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The Relationship Between Daytime Serials and Their Viewers

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The Relationship Between Daytime Serials and Their Viewers

Abstract

This investigation concerns the relationship between the veteran, female, daytime serial viewer and the soap operas she views. More specifically, I will be interested in two general issues: Through the use of open-ended interviews with viewers, I will first be investigating "uses and gratifications," i.e., the purposes served by the soap opera .for the viewer. Second, I will examine how the soap opera is treated by viewers as real or fictional. These two main issues, "uses and gratifications" and the reality/fiction question, will not be considered as being entirely independent of each other. In other words, I will examine whether a viewer's treatment of soap operas as either real or fictional can be related to the purposes served by the serials for her. In connection with these issues, I will explore how the age and educational levels of the viewer relate to her soap opera viewing behavior.

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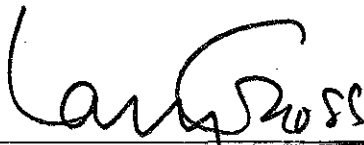
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAYTIME SERIALS
AND THEIR VIEWERS

Sari Thomas

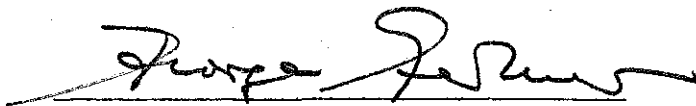
A DISSERTATION
IN
COMMUNICATIONS

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor
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Supervisor of Dissertation



Graduate Group Chairperson

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this volume to the late Professor Sol Worth in acknowledgement of the fact that it was he who initially made it possible for me to pursue the degree to which this dissertation is applied.

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CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH ISSUE

This investigation concerns the relationship between the veteran, female, daytime serial viewer and the soap operas she views. More specifically, I will be interested in two general issues: Through the use of open-ended interviews with viewers, I will first be investigating "uses and gratifications," i.e., the purposes served by the soap opera for the viewer. Second, I will examine how the soap opera is treated by viewers as real or fictional. These two main issues, "uses and gratifications" and the reality/fiction question, will not be considered as being entirely independent of each other. In other words, I will examine whether a viewer's treatment of soap operas as either real or fictional can be related to the purposes served by the serials for her. In connection with these issues, I will explore how the age and educational levels of the viewer relate to her soap opera viewing behavior.

Daytime serials are a specialized and notably popular form of television fiction. It has been estimated that at least fifty million people view soap operas on television, and that 70% of these viewers are women.¹ It has also been estimated that 65%

¹Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going On Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972), p. 200.

of all American women are daytime serial viewers.² Whatever the precise statistics, the soap opera can be considered a potentially powerful source of information for its viewers. I say this not only because of all the theory and research indicating that television (or television fiction) is a forceful instrument of learning in our society, but also because it is highly conceivable that the "continuous-intimacy" that seems to be unique in the relationship between the daytime serial and its viewers may have special implications of its own. In concluding a demographic study and content analysis of soap opera viewers and themes respectively, Katzman states:

The almost realism of the characters and themes, the repetition due to slow pace, and the extremely large number of hours spent viewing soap operas indicate that these shows have great potential power. They can establish or reinforce value systems. They can suggest how people should act in certain situations. They can legitimize behavior and remove taboos about discussion of sensitive topics such as drugs and premarital sex... They help women pass their days in the house by providing almost real stories that are highly involving. The clotheline and the neighborhood store have been replaced by the washer-dryer and the supermarket. Soap opera characters have replaced neighbors as topics of gossip. To some extent, the programs may have replaced gossip itself.

²Madeline Edmondson and David Rounds, The Soaps: Daytime Serials of Radio and TV, (1973), p. 184.

The big question is to what degree the daytime serials change attitudes and norms and to what extent they merely follow and reinforce their audience. A study of viewers is the obvious step toward an answer.³

As I will note in the next chapter, a study (such as that which Katzman suggests) of how viewers use soap operas in their daily lives (e.g., for a source of "gossip") and how the serials fulfill certain social and personal needs of the viewers (e.g., reinforcing values) has not been conducted since the 1940's days of radio. Certainly, one would have good reason to believe that these areas require re-examination if only because the changes in content and format which occurred in transition from radio to television may have affected changes in the treatment given to soap operas by viewers (vs. listeners).

There has been a considerable amount of recent work on the question of the "uses and gratifications" served by television and other media (e.g., Blumler and Katz⁴). However, this work has not considered the daytime television serial. Soap operas should be designated for particular consideration not only because of their tremendous popularity, but because they create for their viewers a very special environment not provided by other

³Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going On Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972), p. 212.

⁴Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz, The Uses of Mass Communications; Current Perspectives on Gratification Research, Sage Annual Review of Communication Research (vol. III, 1974).

television genres -- the indefinite serialization, the almost daily presentations, and the constant exposure of both the banalities and the extreme intimacies of the characters' lives. In fact, with respect to this peculiarity of soap operas, it is interesting to note that while on one hand, violence and sex were, for a short while, prohibited from early prime-time programming (during the "family hour"), murder, drug-taking and illicit cohabitation, on the other hand, were and are being very explicitly detailed in the daytime serials being presented throughout the mornings and afternoons, five days a week, every week of the year. It has been suggested by Katz et al that it is possible to conceive of a "division of labor" operating among media and genres for the satisfaction of audience needs.⁵ In this respect, soap operas in both content and form present a very definite and unique television genre for investigation.

However, it is not only with regard to "uses and gratifications" that soap operas present an interesting case for study. The issue of the extent to which viewers treat daytime serials as real-life versus fiction is also of significance. Briefly put, it can be said that when the viewer perceives the events to be fictional, she demonstrates that she is clearly aware of the "authored" control behind the soap opera events -- that writers

⁵ Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz, The Uses of Mass Communications; Current Perspectives on Gratification Research, Sage Annual Review of Communication Research (vol. III, 1974), p. 25.

and/or director/producers and/or sponsors, but not characters, are responsible for the day to day occurrences that she witnesses on television. When the viewer perceives the events to be real, on the other hand, she does not demonstrate such an awareness. Rather she is a spectator to the ongoing soap opera activities much the same as if she were vicariously experiencing the activities of the family next door with the aid of a pair of binoculars and a sound amplification system.

Those attributes previously described in peculiarly characterizing the soap opera -- open-ended plots, the mixture of both life-like and highly artificial interaction among characters, and so forth -- may be very influential in making a special case for daytime serials in terms of this reality/fiction issue. For example, the "continuous-intimacy" aspect may create a special situation for viewers which is very unlike the relationship established between viewers and other types of television programs. In this case, the ability to see certain people (characters) every day, and to be able to observe, in some fashion, both their social activity and their thoughts as well, may provide a sense of reality not experienced with other television drama. Conversely, because this sort of intimacy may not even be available to viewers in their real-life relationships with others, the soap operas may be particularly viewed as incredibly artificial or unreal. In either case, the special characteristics of the daytime serial are possibly uniquely influential in determining the particular orientation the viewer adopts. In turn, the extent to which a viewer adopts

a reality orientation (i.e., a perspective that treats the serialized events as real-life), or conversely, the extent to which a viewer adopts a fictional orientation (i.e., a perspective that treats the serialized events as fiction) may determine, at least in part, how that viewer will use and be gratified by the soap operas she watches.

Finally, I would like to discuss the significance of considering the age and educational levels of the viewers interviewed for this study. With regard to education, recent research on interpretive strategies conducted by students of Gross and Worth (Messaris,⁶ Thomas,⁷ and Wick⁸) has suggested that the educated individual is generally more sophisticated about media issues, more analytic, and more oriented to the structure of mediated events than the less formally educated person. As I will point out later, this analytic ability and attentiveness to structure, etc., bears most directly on the reality/fiction question, and it will be interesting to investigate whether or not the interpretive

⁶Paul Messaris, "Interpretational Styles and Film Training," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (1975).

⁷Sari Thomas, "The Relationship between Television and the Interpretation of Real and Fictional Images," Master's Thesis, Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, (1973).

⁸Thomas Wick, "Attributional and Inferential Interpretational Strategies and Variations in Their Application to Written Communications as a Function of Training and Format," Master's Thesis, Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, (1973).

patterns found in the research with regard to other media and genres are confirmed with respect to the special case of soap operas.

While educational level is largely pertinent to the reality/fiction issue, age is included as a respondent variable in terms of its relevance to the uses and gratifications area. More specifically, whereas social class and other variables are not always very visibly designated among soap opera characters in the actual dramas, their various age classifications (at least to the point of an older/younger dichotomy) seems to be much more clear-cut within the serials. For this reason, in exploring the satisfactions viewers derive from soap operas -- e.g., whether or not older viewers prefer to see, and "identify" best with older characters -- the inclusion of an age variable among viewer-respondents will, I hope, be very functional and informative in this analysis.

Clearly, this is not to say that educational level and age categories can only be considered as being informative exclusively in the ways designated above. Certainly, educational level could be used to discuss uses and gratifications -- why, for example, characters portrayed as working class individuals may be preferred to those playing professionals, or vice versa. Similarly, with regard to reality/fiction issues, younger viewers weaned into a "television generation" may have different critical assessment patterns from those viewers acculturated several generations earlier. Therefore, while these two variables, education and age,

were brought into this study for rather specific research reasons as noted earlier, they can serve as utile organizers of data in other ways.

In this study, the following areas will be investigated:

1. Viewers' use of and gratifications derived from soap opera viewing.
2. How viewers treat soap opera material as either reality or fiction.
3. The relationship between the previous two issues, and, in addition, whether or not the respondents' age and educational levels are systematically associated in the patterns of this relationship.

CHAPTER II: CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ON DAYTIME SERIALS

The daytime serials are a genre distinct from all others. From a production viewpoint, they are special in that each soap opera brings forth approximately 260 original shows per year -- every weekday with no reruns. Because of this constraint, soap opera production is quick (usually one episode per day) and functions on a relatively inexpensive budget (usually less than \$200,000 per show). The central cast for a daytime serial is huge compared to prime-time series (20 or more continuing characters) and, of course, unlike prime-time series, the soap opera is a multi-plotted, truly continuous narrative. A detective on a prime-time series may kill a criminal and fall in love in one week's episode, while the next week's segments (and those which follow as well) will generally have no memory of either the killing or the loving. Television series, therefore, are composed of discrete units in which generally only the main characters' names, faces, occupations and hometowns are preserved from week to week. The problems and experiences of daytime serial characters, on the other hand, are played out from day to day. In this sense (although soap operas are sometimes guilty of taking narrative short-cuts) the similarity between real, everyday life and soap operas is apparent.

Although it is easy to explain the "soap" half of the epithet -- continuing from the days of radio, soap manufacturers have largely assumed the sponsorship of these shows -- the "opera" half of the label surely seems to facetiously point to that which the daytime serial supposedly is not: "high culture." Aside from those individuals who are particularly enamored of the products of mass or "pop" culture, established critics and experts would not seemingly be found regarding the daytime serial as a sophisticated art form. While it could be argued that this apparent scorn is a justifiable product of listening to and viewing one-dimensional characters, stilted dialogue, unimaginative sets, and generally, narrative contrivance beyond belief, there is indeed another possibility which logically might account for the stigma attached to soap operas; since their origin, daytime serials have been a genre associated with women. Therefore, the belittling of the serials can be seen as just one more example of power-oppression politics.

Presently, over 50% of daytime programming is composed of soap operas, and given the figures offered in the previous chapter with regard to women viewers, one is dealing with a very successful business or at least it would seem. Since their transition from radio to television, daytime serials have been increasing in length from 15 minutes per segment to full-hour daily episodes. Clearly, favorable ratings recommended these increases.

Despite their enormous popularity, there has been very little social scientific research published on television soap operas. Furthermore, although there have been some "content studies" recently produced (Katzman,⁹ Downing¹⁰) there has not been any in-depth research specifically concerning daytime serial viewers. Three decades ago three studies were conducted in this area. However, these studies are out of date if only because they involved a radio audience. Nevertheless, these three research projects are quite impressive, and they were considerably useful in constructing the present research project. For this reason, I will begin by briefly describing them.

Of all the work on soap operas conducted in the 1940's, Herta Herzog's work was the most extensive. "What We Know about Daytime Serial Listeners" involved a twofold project.¹¹ First, Herzog attempted a comparative study of listeners and non-listeners in terms of the extent to which they were isolated from their community, their "intellectual" range, their interest in public affairs and current events, the extent to which they were beset

⁹Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going On Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972).

¹⁰Mildred Downing, "The World of Daytime Serials," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (1975).

¹¹Herta Herzog, "What We Know about Daytime Serial Listeners," Radio Research, 1942-43 (1944).

by "anxieties and frustrations," and their preferences and practices in terms of the media. The second part of her analysis involved a study of the satisfaction listeners said they derived from daytime serials.

Herzog's perspective was largely psychological, bordering on the clinical, e.g., she asked the following question of her research:

What satisfactions do listeners say they derive from daytime serials? As psychologists, what is our judgment on these assertions? ¹²

Herzog almost never assumed anything but this type of perspective in analyzing her interview data. For example, Herzog classified a listener's response to one of her interview questions as "compensation for the listener's own troubles" and analyzed the informant's answer as follows:

Thus a woman who had a hard time bringing up her two children after her husband's death, mentions the heroine of Hilltop House as one of her favorites, feeling that she "ought not to get married ever in order to continue the wonderful work she is doing at the orphanage." This respondent compensates for her own resented fate by wishing a slightly worse one upon her favorite story character; preoccupied by her own husband's death, she wants the heroine to have no husband at all and to sacrifice herself for the orphan children; if she, the listener, must do so for her own. ¹³

¹²Herta Herzog, "What We Know about Daytime Serial Listeners," Radio Research, 1942-43 (1944), p. 4.

¹³Ibid., p. 24.

Aside from the debatable logic of this analysis, Herzog ultimately focused upon the listener's orientation to life via soap operas rather than their orientations to soap operas, per se. She did not, for example, really substantiate her statements concerning media-related issues. She wrote:

The listeners do not experience the sketches as fictitious or imaginary. They take them as reality and listen to them in terms of their own personal problems. ¹⁴

While this claim may have indeed been true, Herzog did not supply arguments to support such assertions -- unless the implications are that merely relating oneself to fictional material indicates that the stories are taken as documentary accounts. Let us look at the following four excerpts from interviews with Herzog's informants. These excerpts involve the respondents' briefly articulated understanding of a specific radio serial's content.

It is concerning a doctor, his life and how he always tries to do the right thing. Sometimes he gets left out in the cold too.

Dr. Brent is a wonderful man, taking such good care of a poor little orphan boy. He is doing God's work.

It is drama, Jim Brent and Dr. Carsons -- Jealousy, you know. There are several characters

¹⁴Herta Herzog, "On Borrowed Experience," Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, (1941), p. 67.

but Jim Brent is the important one. He will win out in the end.

It is about a young doctor in Chicago. I like to hear how he cures sick people. It makes me wonder if he could cure me too. ¹⁵

With regard to the foregoing discussion, the important point is that instead of analyzing, for example, her informants' use of terms like "characters" and "drama," or conversely, instead of analyzing situations as presented in the last of the four excerpts, where the individual blatantly ignores the notions of acting and fiction, Herzog was completely drawn into how these responses reflected her informants' personal problems. With respect to the cited excerpts, Herzog stated the following:

...a sick listener stresses the sick people cured by the doctor in the story. The young high school girl, who wishes she knew interesting people like Dr. Brent, picks the jealousy aspect of the story and the way Dr. Brent stands up to it. The woman over forty, with a memory of a sad childhood, insists that Dr. Brent is "doing God's work." And the mother sacrificing herself for an unappreciative family feels a common bond in the fact that "sometimes he (Dr. Brent) is left out in the cold too."¹⁶

In the same volume of Radio Research in which Herzog's work appears (and apparently drawing upon the same data bank), Helen Kaufman conducted an investigation to determine how the specific

¹⁵Herta Herzog, "On Borrowed Experience," Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, (1941), p. 68.

¹⁶Ibid.

content of a serial accounted for variation in its audience's demography.¹⁷ The basic finding in Kaufman's research was that a listener selects a particular soap opera in terms of its fitting most closely with her personal situation. More specifically, Kaufman suggested that women will seek out programs that reinforce or justify their present condition. Therefore, the implication was that listeners don't particularly want an "escape" via soap operas, but rather they wish to hear someone successfully deal with problems similar to their own. For example, Kaufman offered the following analysis:

The appeal of Stella Dallas for women of low socioeconomic status and for rural women does not seem difficult to understand. Stella herself is a country woman of little education. However, she has remarkable personal qualities which she devotes unselfishly to the service of other people, particularly of her own class... the serial never ceases to impress upon its listeners that wealth and high social status are not really desirable because the higher up people are in the world, the more incapable they seem of solving their own problems and the more lacking they are in true human values.¹⁸

When Kaufman conducted her study, the stories on daytime radio serials were rather varied in terms of plot and the social statuses of characters, although any given serial tended to be homogenous with respect to such variables. For example, the radio serial

¹⁷Helen Kaufman, "The Appeal of Specific Daytime Serials," Radio Research, 1942-43 (1944).

¹⁸Ibid., p. 92.

Stella Dallas revolved around a lower middle-class divorced woman, The Romance of Helen Trent concerned an upper middle-class woman, The Goldbergs involved the life of a Jewish family, and so on.

Although there are differences among them, contemporary television soap operas do not seem to operate on this same principle. Rather, within each serial many sub-plots and main characters are included, and the diversity of social classes and types of characters and problems are more or less common to all serials. For this reason, Kaufman's brand of correlation between serial selection and the demographic characteristics of the viewer cannot be transferred part and parcel to the analysis of data in the present study.

In other words, in this research project it is necessary to differentiate among story lines and characters within the given soap operas in order to determine whether age, educational level or other social categories are relevant to the viewers' preferences.

In another study published in 1948, Lloyd Warner and William Henry interviewed listeners with regard to one specific daytime radio serial.¹⁹ From these interviews, they attempted to generalize for purposes of determining how the behavior of female listeners was affected by Big Sister and similar daytime radio serials. Aside from its one serial limitation, this research was

¹⁹W.L. Warner and William Henry, "The Radio Daytime Serial; A Symbolic Analysis," Genetic Psychology Monographs, (1948).

similar to Herzog's and Kaufman's work. It differed mainly in that Warner and Henry included various projective techniques (e.g., Thematic Apperception Test) in order to determine the "effects" of listening.

Like Kaufman, Warner and Henry concluded that the serial in question functioned for its listeners as a "contemporary minor morality play." According to the researchers, it positively portrayed middle-class virtues and glorified the housewife while making any other career for women appear totally unattractive in comparison. Consequently, Warner and Henry concluded that women listeners, who were predominantly middle-class housewives, easily identified with the sentiments expressed in the dramatization.

The three studies briefly discussed above are perhaps the most germane to the research project at hand. Other work on soap operas, of course, has been conducted. Katzman presents a "retrospective" on soap operas and their viewers.²⁰ First, he offers an audience analysis of why soap operas are expanding to meet population demands, and also a demographic analysis of audience characteristics. Following this, Katzman presents a highly abbreviated content analysis of current (1972) soap operas including recurrent themes, characters, and topics of conversation.

²⁰Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going On Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972).

Downing has prepared a much more elaborate content analysis of daytime serials.²¹ She presents a very complex description of the serials, concerning herself with details of the actual production, the themes presented, the physical settings of the various stories, the interpersonal relationships enacted, and a demographic analysis of the soap opera characters.

Probably the earliest antecedent of these content analyses is that performed by Arnheim who also explored setting, characters, interpersonal relationships and narrative themes in radio serials.²²

In addition to these studies, an enormous amount of popular and purely subjective descriptions and analyses of soap operas and their viewers have been printed. It is this relative paucity of current social scientific research on daytime serial viewers that, in part, has prompted me to undertake the present study.

²¹Mildred Downing, "The World of Daytime Serials," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (1975).

²²Rudolf Arnheim, "The World of the Daytime Serial," Radio Research, 1942-43 (1944).

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

In this section, the entire design of this study will be presented. This statement of method follows the research from the construction of the questionnaire used in the open-ended interviews, through informant selection and interview procedure, and concludes with the coding scheme designed for analyzing the interviews.

The Interviewing Instrument

Using Herzog's structured, but open-ended, oral questionnaire as a model, a similar interview form was constructed. (See Appendix I for a complete copy of this form.) After using this questionnaire in a series of preliminary interviews, the form underwent minor revisions. The end result was a questionnaire structured to match a set of conceptual categories:

Area I: Uses and Gratifications

The questions in this area were devised to determine how and when viewers employ soap operas or soap opera material in their everyday lives, and to investigate both the contentment and dissatisfaction viewers experience with the serials. The area of "uses and gratifications" was divided into seven specific sections:

A. The Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing -- This section was principally designed to investigate the operations

involved in soap opera viewing, e.g., the physical conditions under which individuals view soap operas, how frequently they view, etc.

- B. The Specific Appeals of Soap Operas as a Television Genre -- This section examines how viewers compare soap operas to other television fare.
- C. The Individual Precedents and Continuing Motivation of Soap Opera Viewing -- Here, the emphasis is placed upon how viewers become involved with daytime serials and why they continued to view.
- D. The Interactional Function of Soap Opera Viewing -- This section is designed to explore two interrelated issues; first, the extent to which viewers talk about soap opera people, situations and so forth in everyday conversation, and second, the extent to which viewers see soap operas as providing a "one-way mirror," so to speak, through which to peek in order to see how other people are getting along. The first issue, the use of soap opera material in conversation, may be regarded as an explicit interactional function, whereas the second issue, the surveillance of "others," may be considered a form of vicarious interaction.
- E. The "Cathartic" Function of Soap Operas -- While this study does not really explore the psychodynamics of

soap opera viewing in terms of "emotional release," this section is used to straightforwardly examine laughing and crying reactions to soap opera material.

- F. Soap Operas and Social Learning -- This section is aimed at discovering the degree to which and the ways in which the daytime serial informs and "educates" the viewer. Essentially three major questions are important here:
1. The types of problems and/or issues viewers are most interested in seeing portrayed on serials.
 2. The degree to which viewers can identify with and/or personalize these problems.
 3. The degree to which and the ways in which soap opera behavior can be perceived by viewers as models of interaction from which learning can take place.

- G. Soap Operas and Social Adjustment -- In certain ways this section is similar to Helen Kaufman's work discussed in the previous chapter. Here, the concern is with the extent to which viewers seek out socially reinforcing material in the soap operas. This "seeking out" may be related to two issues: demographics and values. In other words, to what extent are viewers most interested in soap opera material that involves characters who in terms of age, sex, marital

status, values, morality and so forth are most like themselves.

Area II: Reality/Fiction Orientations

In the interview form, the second area, consisting of two sections, is devoted to determining the degree to which the viewer treats soap opera material as real-life, or conversely as fiction. However, it is important to note that in analyzing the interview data, responses to questions in this last area alone were not the sole body of material designated to cover this reality/fiction issue. Rather, much of the material in the uses and gratifications area will serve the dual purpose of both providing information with regard to the seven sections in Area I as well as Area II (Reality/Fiction Orientations). Therefore, the two additional sections in Area II to be briefly described now, were used to supplement the data obtained in Area I.

In Area II, the two sections are as follows:

- A. Extra-Frame Issues -- This section was designed to investigate viewers' attitudes toward soap opera actors outside of the specific dramatized context of the performance.
- B. Structure-Related Issues -- This section was designed to examine the extent to which viewers notice and are

concerned with elements of the soap opera production, per se, as opposed to only the interpersonal interaction portrayed.

In summary then, the basic outline of the interview form is as follows:

Area I: Uses and Gratifications

- A. The Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing
- B. The Specific Appeals of Soap Operas as a Television Genre
- C. The Individual Precedents and Continuing Motivation of Soap Opera Viewing
- D. The Interactional Function of Soap Opera Viewing
- E. The "Cathartic" Function of Soap Opera Viewing
- F. Soap Operas and Social Learning
- G. Soap Operas and Social Adjustment

Area II: Reality/Fiction Orientations

- A. Extra-Frame Issues
- B. Structure-Related Issues

Administration of Interviews

As noted earlier, the interviews were orally administered. The interview sessions, each generally lasting one-and-one-half hours, were recorded on tape for transcription and subsequent analysis. The questions were presented, more or less, in the order in which they appear on the interview form. Of course,

since each interview was open-ended, and since some of the questions are only logical extensions of prior questions, a respondent would sometimes answer more than one question in a single response. The thematic arrangement of the interview format (i.e., the theoretical categories outlined above) helped to maintain fluency in the actual interview session.

Informants and Research Design

Forty Caucasian, Philadelphia women were recruited to participate as respondents in this research project. Each respondent was required to be a veteran viewer of a minimum of two serials -- a veteran viewer being one who has watched a given serial for a minimum of one year and at least once per week. The informants varied in the following three ways:

1. Age. Informants were evenly divided into two age groups: 18-30 and 35 and over.
2. Educational Level. Informants were also evenly divided into two groups based on the amount of formal education they had received: High School education or less (non-college) and college educated (at least two years).
3. Specific Serial. Informants were also divided in terms of viewing a specific daytime serial. Interviews with one half of the informants were partially geared to the serial All My Children and the remaining half were focused, in part, on the soap opera The Young and the Restless. As can be seen in the

interview form, many of the issues approached are not serial-specific. However, the rationale for employing a specific serial orientation, in part, was largely for purposes of comparability -- it enabled one to determine that differences among informants' responses are not simply a function of varying soap opera content themes. Also, a serial-specific orientation facilitates the interview style by giving focus to an informant who might ordinarily have several serials in her repertoire. As can be seen in the interview form, it was specifically when the respondent was called upon to discuss liked and disliked characters, to make story-line predictions, and so forth, that the serial-specific orientation was called into play.

The reason, of course, for dealing with two different serials in this research was to prevent the interview data from being biased in terms of viewers of any one given serial. (However, it should be noted that a respondent could conceivably view both of these serials.)

Lastly, the soap operas chosen for specific focus were selected for three reasons: First and foremost, they are both popular serials and therefore stood little chance of going off the air during the course of this project. Second, in Philadelphia they were both broadcast around the noon hour making them more accessible to working women and college

students, who, together, largely comprised the higher-educated half of informants, i.e., a different selection of soap operas might have made it more difficult to recruit college-educated informants. Third, I, as the interviewer, had complete familiarity with both of these serials and therefore, in-depth discussions could be better facilitated.

In summary then, the forty informants were sub-divided as follows:

- 5: Younger, non-college, All My Children (AMC)
- 5: Younger, non-college, The Young and the Restless (YAR)
- 5: Younger, college, AMC
- 5: Younger, college, YAR
- 5: Older, non-college, AMC
- 5: Older, non-college, YAR
- 5: Older, college, AMC
- 5: Older, college, YAR

Method of Analysis

In discussing the results of this investigation in the next chapter, the category headings provided in the interview form will be employed for purposes of organization. Although particular interview questions were subsumed under each of these theoretical categories, this, of course, does not mean that the respondents were aware of the general conceptual outline. In other words, since no division was explicitly made from one section to another

during an actual interview, and, since the interview was open-ended, the particular responses to questions in a given section were not always the responses -- or more usually, the only responses -- applicable to the analysis of the issue that given section was established to investigate. For example, when asked, "Why do you continue to watch soap operas?" (a question formally located in the Uses and Gratifications Area under "Individual Precedents..."), a viewer might have gone on to elaborate upon how she learns to cope with her children as a result of viewing. This particular response may be extremely applicable to the "Soap Operas and Social Learning" category even though the discussion takes place in a "different part" of the interview. Similarly, when asked this same question in the beginning of the interview (Why do you continue to watch soap operas?), a viewer might answer, "I don't know." However, later in the interview when discussing her favorite characters (usually in the "Soap Operas and Social Adjustment" section) this same informant might say that she continues to view soap operas because she "loves to be entertained by the high quality of acting." Therefore, in analyzing the data, it would be a misuse of the richness of the material to limit the coding to responses to a given question or even series of questions. Rather, all the discussion throughout the interview that is germane to a given coding issue was considered applicable.

In considering the entire interview transcript as open to analysis for any given issue, another important fact comes into play; the same response or set of responses may be used to point out or clarify different theoretical issues, and, therefore, may be subject to more than one coding scheme.

As noted, each interview was recorded and fully transcribed. Every transcription was made subject to the same coding procedure. The coding instrument appears in Appendix II. It should be noted that, for the most part, the coding units within a given issue were derived from the transcripts themselves. In other words, units were drawn from variations in the responses, per se, rather than from pre-determined categories. (See Pike's etic/emic distinction.²³) For example, in analyzing how viewers have been introduced to daytime serials, all the possibilities provided in the informants' discussions were recorded. Following this, some of the possibilities were "collapsed" when it seemed appropriate for the sake of clear organization, e.g., the coding possibility "from childhood, as a result of older viewer in household," might include viewers who, as a child, were introduced to soap operas by their mothers, grandmothers, etc.

²³Kenneth L. Pike, "Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior," Communication and Culture: Readings in the Codes of Human Interaction, (1966).

Certainly, when dealing with such complex data (as that resulting from rather long, open-ended interviews) one wishes to establish some sort of reliability for the inferences drawn. For this study, eight transcripts (two from each informant category) were made subject to two codings -- one performed by myself, and the second by a graduate student in Communications who was also familiar with many soap operas, particularly the two serials on which these interviews centered in part. There was a 95% correspondence between each set of coded transcripts.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION; USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

This section involves how the informants reported using daytime serials in their everyday lives. Specifically, the issues of mechanics of viewing, the specific appeal of soap operas, motivation for viewing, the interactional and cathartic functions of viewing, social learning and social adjustment will be discussed.

1. The Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing

As explained earlier, this section of the uses and gratifications area is principally designed to investigate the actual social and physical circumstances in which soap opera viewing takes place.

THE NUMBER OF SOAP OPERAS VIEWED -- The forty informants on the average regularly viewed 3.17 soap operas. There does not seem to be a great deal of difference between younger and older viewers in this respect (3.15 vs. 3.2 serials viewed, respectively). However, it appears that on the average, the non-college educated group does tend to regularly view more serials (3.35) than do the college-educated informants (3.0). Clearly, this may be seen as a reflection of time spent in the home; the college group were more apt to have their daytime hours consumed by either classes or employment than were informants in the non-college

group. This "home-orientation" theory accounting for the number of serials viewed is reinforced by the fact that of the college-student informants (nine out of ten women in the 18-30 college group) most reported watching more serials over vacations in the school year.

FREQUENCY OF VIEWING -- On the average, informants viewed their regular serials 3.47 days per week. This, of course, is out of the five weekdays soap operas are broadcast. Again, while it appears that the younger viewers watch serials slightly more often than do the older viewers (3.6 vs. 3.3 times per week) the real distinction occurs between the two education levels (college: 2.65, non-college: 4.3). Indeed, it is the force of the young non-college group (4.6) in and of itself, which accounts for any noticeable distinction between the younger and older groups.

NETWORK CHANGING -- While the purpose of compiling these data will be explained in connection with a forthcoming discussion of intimate vs. remote orientations, for the present, it can be noted that in terms of the serials she regularly views, the college-educated viewer is more likely to change channels during her viewing day than are members of the non-college group. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the non-college group, on the whole, views more serials than do the college informants.

CONSECUTIVE VIEWING -- Again, the import of this issue will be discussed later in this chapter. For the present, it can be said that about half the informants view serials consecutively (i.e., in a solid time block) and half view them spaced over time.

While this distinction breaks down fairly evenly in each age category, the more highly educated informants, particularly the younger women, are more inclined to watch serials through the day rather than in one solid block. Conversely, more than half the members of the non-college group do watch the serials consecutively. While it might seem that the "home-orientation" issue is at work here -- i.e., the non-college group because they tend to be at home more would, therefore, tend to view serials consecutively -- it is not fully logical. For, it could also be argued that since the college informants tend to spend less time at home, their viewing would also probably be done in a solid block, e.g., over the lunch break.

SCHEDULING -- Twenty-six of the 40 informants reported that they do not schedule their serials into their everyday routines. In other words, more than half the informants claim that their viewing depends upon whether or not they are "free" at the time of their serials. However, of the 14 respondents who do arrange their activities around their serials, only one of these informants is among the college-educated women.

Clearly, one interpretation of these figures is simply that the day-to-day ongoings of members of the college group are less amenable to scheduling than are those of the more "home-oriented" non-college informants. Indeed, the latter informants are more capable of performing their daily activities while viewing than are those who either attend classes or work.

ALONE/TOGETHER -- When asked if they prefer viewing serials alone or with others, 18 informants opted for viewing alone, 12 preferred viewing with others, and 10 informants said they had no preference.

While there is no substantial difference between the younger and older informants on this issue, it is clear that the more educated viewers are those who prefer to view in the company of others (11 of the 12). One reason that this preference probably exists is due to the fact that many college-educated informants, in particular the younger group, reported that their initial contact with serials began as a group activity in college; friends and/or housemates would come together to view soap operas. As will be discussed later, while several non-college informants were introduced to soap operas through friends who also watched, when this did occur, the introduction was usually accomplished through word-of-mouth (e.g., "You really should watch General Hospital") rather than as an actual group activity.

OUTSIDE INTERRUPTIONS -- When asked what they would do if a friend came to the door or the phone rang while viewing a serial, informants variously offered one of the following five options:

- 1) Total postponement of interruption until the segment is completed, e.g., asking the individual to return the call or asking a guest to wait until a commercial to talk.
- 2) Total postponement or attendance to both (see below) depending on the circumstances
- 3) Attending to both the interruption and the serial simultaneously (or to the best of the informant's ability to do so)
- 4) Attending to both or turning off the set depending on circumstances
- 5) Turning off the TV set

Of the 40 respondents, over 50% claimed they would either turn off the TV set exclusively or turn off the set and/or attend to both events simultaneously (options 4 and 5). Only seven women reported that they totally postponed interruptions when they occurred.

Since the five options offered above could be considered to be an ordering of priorities with regard to the importance of the serial, it was decided that something of a "dedication scale" could be constructed in which a score of 5 would indicate complete dedication (i.e., 5 = option 1, where the informant totally postpones interruptions during serials), a score of 1 would

indicate very little dedication (i.e., 1 = option 5, where the informant turns off the set upon being interrupted), and the scores 2, 3, and 4 would be substituted for the remaining options in rank order of dedication.

Using this one to five scale, the 40 informants averaged a dedication level of 2.6 -- which would be between options 3 and 4. With regard to the age distinction, there was absolutely no difference between the young and old informants -- each group averaged approximately 2.6 on the dedication scale. However, when one considers the group in terms of educational levels, one sees a rather striking disparity. More specifically, the average rank on the dedication scale for informants in the college educated group was a little more than 1.9, whereas the non-college group averaged approximately 3.2 in terms of dedication. In other words, in terms of other social events, the more educated informants reported considerably less dedication to viewing their serials than did the less educated women.

It might also be pointed out that while the more highly educated, younger informants reported less dedication to their serials than did the younger, but less educated informants (2.4 vs. 2.7, respectively), the difference which accounts for the even larger disparity between the college and non-college groups is reflected in the difference between the two groups of older informants. More specifically, while the more educated

older informants were the least dedicated among the four groups (average rank = 1.5), the less educated older respondents were the most dedicated (average rank + 3.6).

THE MECHANICS OF SOAP OPERA VIEWING; THE REMOTE VS. INTIMATE DISTINCTION

In reviewing the issues approached in this first uses and gratifications section, a definite pattern which crosses the individual questions may be seen as having emerged. This pattern may be labeled a remote vs. intimate distinction. More specifically, five of the issues already discussed and one additional issue which will be described shortly may, when taken together, be seen as constituting a profile in terms of the respondents' viewing habits. In terms of the data compiled, it seems quite clear that this profile, in terms of the more educated informants, is quite different from that which characterizes the viewing habits of the less educated respondents. In the first case -- that of the more educated respondents -- I am labeling the general orientation as being remote, that is a rather remote or distanced relationship with the daytime serials. With regard to the less educated respondents, this general orientation is labeled intimate in that it reflects a more involved interaction with the soap operas.

Now, let me explain the criteria for these distinctions.

As stated, there are six issues when considered jointly that contribute to the determination of whether viewers possess a remote or intimate relationship with the serials they view. The first five are issues previously discussed and so they will be re-analyzed as briefly as possible. The sixth issue, because it presents new data, will receive somewhat more elaboration. The distinctions can be seen as follows:

- 1) Network Changing -- It may be argued that the extent to which a viewer remains passively tuned to one station, watching serial after serial unfold in a seemingly uninterrupted, "natural" flow, that viewer possesses one aspect of an intimate orientation. On the other hand, to the extent that the viewer actively changes that dial, seeking out one program often to the exclusion of another serial, that viewer is taking charge of her set, so to speak, and therefore, might seem to be more aware of the programmed aspects of the various productions. Thus, active network changing is considered one dimension of the remote classification in that it demonstrates that the viewer senses the selection possibilities and is not caught up, for whatever reasons, in the undeliberate evolution of intimacy.
- 2) Consecutive Viewing -- The rationale for the remote vs. intimate distinction here is exactly the same as just described for the network-changing issue. In other words, the

intimate-oriented viewer tends to watch the stories as they "naturally" unfold in time, whereas the more remote viewer is more inclined to break the stream.

- 3) Scheduling of Activities -- Here it is claimed that to the extent that a respondent's willingness to view her serials on a given day is a function of whether or not she has "free time" in her schedule, that respondent fulfills one criterion relevant to a remote orientation. Conversely, to the extent that special arrangements are made by the viewer in scheduling her work, commitments, etc., in order to see her serials, that viewer may be said to be, at least in part, intimately oriented.
- 4) Alone/Togghether -- The intimate response here is signaled by a preference for viewing alone; the intimate orientation would not normally be one in which the viewer regarded soap opera viewing as a social activity such as a bridge game. She prefers to be alone with the soap opera events. The viewer who maintains a more remote posture toward the serials, on the other hand, not only doesn't require being sealed off from the real-world when viewing, she actually prefers to have other people with her.
- 5) Dedication in terms of Outside Interruptions -- Here, as one might suppose, the more intimately involved viewer is one who ranks higher on the dedication scale. In other words, an intimate relationship with serials might be characterized, in part,

by an unwillingness to set the serial fully or partially aside in order to deal with other types of interpersonal activity. The more remote viewer, on the other hand, would rank lower on the dedication scale; she would be more willing to turn her attention from the serials to the 'live' interaction at hand.

- 6) Expansion of Repertoire -- In the interview session, the informants, after stating the number of serials they viewed, were asked if they would like to view more serials. Of the 40 informants, only 12 said that they would like to expand their viewing repertoires. Clearly, this bit of information does not seem to be particularly applicable to the intimate vs. remote distinction at hand. However, when a viewer indicated that she had no desire to see any more serials than she already viewed, she was asked about the reason for her decision. In analyzing the reasons that respondents gave for not wanting to expand their viewing repertoire, two classifications were established:

- a) Time Expenditure -- a response was classified as a 'time expenditure' rationale when a viewer said that she didn't wish to expend any more physical time:

I already have too many frivolous activities in my life and soap operas are silly and a good waste of time. (Younger, College)

- b) Emotional Expenditure -- a response was coded in terms of an 'emotional expenditure' when a viewer stated that she would not care to increase the number of serials she watched because she didn't wish to become any more emeshed in the soap operas' problems and intrigues:

No, I'd sooner watch a good game show. I wouldn't want to get any more involved than I already am. They can really drain you, you know.
(Younger, Non-college)

While 28 informants claimed that they didn't want to expand their viewing repertoire, there was a distinct difference in terms of rationales between the more highly and less educated informants. Of the 12 college informants, 11 gave time considerations in declining to watch more soap operas, whereas of the 16 non-college informants, 9 cited emotional expenditure as a justification. Indeed, the fact that only four members of the non-college group (as opposed to eight in the college group) were willing to expand their viewing repertoires seems to support this pattern.

As the data suggest, in terms of each of the six issues outlined above, the viewers in the non-college group could be characterized as having a predominantly intimate orientation to daytime serials. These viewers seem to be closer, more personally involved, and more serious about soap opera material -- at least

in terms of the issues raised in this section. Conversely, the more highly educated viewers, in terms of all six criteria, demonstrated a less-involved, more remote disposition toward serial viewing.

Appeals of Soap Operas as a Television Genre

were simply asked whether or not they preferred other types of TV shows, and in the course of this issue, we talked about other types of programming. Of 40 informants, only 13 stated that they preferred serials to other television fare. Twenty-two preferred other types of programming, and five

that in terms of age and educational factors,

less-educated respondents had a preference for other programming, although the age effect is largely

the older, non-college informants who were

exposed to other television fare, i.e., the

informants were again more similar in their

younger college viewers. It might seem

those viewers who, in the previous section,

were characterized as having a more intimate relationship

were also those who say that they do not

prefer other television programming. However,

Individual Precedents and Continuing Motiva-

tion the significance of these data in

the kinds of programs the viewers preferred

there did not seem to be much of a pattern.

Situation comedy was mentioned by members of all groups. Documentaries were noted among other types of programs by informants in every category but the one composed of older, less-educated women. And, with regard to documentaries and the like, it might be suggested (although ultimately difficult to prove) that the noting of some sort of 'educational' format is somewhat obligatory among many people when questioned about their viewing habits. Indeed, it makes some sense that both young and college-educated respondents would offer documentaries in such contexts of interrogation, for these individuals are those over whom the pseudo-intellectual criticism of the major network 'vast wastelandism' has swept.²⁴ The more educated hear it in the classroom and amid cocktail party chatter, while the younger women have usually been forced to consider this issue because of parental responsibilities. Perhaps, the older, less educated women have never been required to adopt this posture.

It might also be interesting to note that only younger women mentioned movies as a preference, and that only older women, particularly those in the non-college group, noted a preference for musical-variety shows over soap operas.

²⁴The reference to pseudo-intellectualism does not refer to criticism of major network programming, but to the "midcult" belief that public broadcasting or more 'serious' network offerings (such as documentaries) are somehow substantially different.

3. Individual Precedents and Continuing Motivation of Soap Opera Viewing

As previously noted, in this section we will be concerned with two issues. The first issue is the way in which informants were first introduced to soap operas (initial motivation) and the second is the reasons informants give for continuing with their serials (continuing motivation).

a. Initial Motivation

The informants in this study appear to have been introduced to soap-opera watching in one of three ways:

- 1) Through friends -- These viewers have little or no memory of seeing or hearing soap operas as a child. If someone in their house had been a soap opera fan, they do not remember ever following or attempting to follow a story with said person. Rather, these viewers were introduced as an adult to soap operas and their introduction was through friends who also viewed. However, there were two different ways in which respondents were introduced to daytime serials 'through friends': The first way is by word of mouth, i.e., someone who already was a viewer told a respondent that it would be worthwhile for one reason or another to view serial X or serials in general. Another type of introduction belonging to this category occurred when a respondent

simply heard her friends discussing a serial or serials and then decided to view:

See, I was taking care of youngsters when my kids were real little and I was so busy, I never had time to look at programs. And then my children got bigger and they're out working and I got sort of -- I wanted to look at something. And that's how I got engrossed with a couple of them. So my friends said that there were a couple of good ones on and they started to look and all and that is how it started. (Older, Non-college)

The second way is through actual participation with friends:

...it was sort of a social thing to watch them. It was a group of people who did this regularly and that participation wasn't just passive watching -- it was participating or anticipating lines or plots and that's what made it interesting...It had to do with the time of day. It was during lunch...we would be in that area anyway. Somebody would turn on the television and that is how you get hooked. I had never watched a soap opera until I was a junior. (Younger, College)

- 2) From childhood -- These viewers distinctly remember listening to or viewing serials as a child along with an older member of the family who is invariably female and is usually the mother and/or grandmother.
- 3) Independently -- These viewers were not prompted to begin soap opera viewing as a result of any specific sort of interpersonal contact. Rather, they reported that at

one point or another (usually after age 14) they turned on their television because there was "nothing else to do" and happened to begin watching soap operas.

Given the popularity of soap operas since the days of radio, it might seem odd that only four informants reported that their viewing (or listening) experience began in childhood. However, there are three points to be considered here. First, children are usually in school when soap operas are broadcast. Second and more importantly, as previously discussed data in this report suggest, the less-educated viewer (and only a small percentage of women 20 or more years ago were college educated) may prefer to view soap operas unaccompanied. Therefore, even if the informants as children were at home, they perhaps were not welcome in the viewing circle even if they were so motivated. Indeed, on several occasions I had the experience of viewing serials with my informants, and several times the informants' children were sent out to play while the mother and I watched. I was informed that this was a normal occurrence. Third, for informants who were over 50 years of age, it of course would have been somewhat more improbable, because of the advent of mass radio, for them to have been

initiated as a child. Of the women who came by watching serials independently, the largest group was composed of the older non-college women, and the smallest group consisted of the young college women. The fact that older homemakers or retired women might have more free-time to experiment with television programs suggests that these data are also quite reasonable.

b. Continuing Motivation

It is, of course, difficult to articulate the reason why one specifically watches a given television program or type of program. In designing the interview form for this study, I was uncertain as to whether a discussion of why the informant kept up her soap opera viewing -- why she continued -- would be particularly interesting. Certainly, in contemporary American society there are few myths (or philosophical postures, if you will) stronger than that which purports that fiction in the mass media -- particularly TV -- primarily serves those enigmatic 'needs' such as "entertainment", relaxation, "escape", and so forth. Psychologically, it is a useful belief because it is an easy rationale and, more importantly, because it implicitly asserts that we are not affected... that we do not learn or absorb...that we are stronger

than TV/ And, because of its utility in these respects, and simply because it has been offered up so frequently in the past and therefore may be a 'conditioned' response, so to speak, it seemed quite possible to me, at the inception of this research, that informants would invariably report that they watch soap operas "to be entertained". Certainly, I didn't expect respondents to tell me (or necessarily be able to tell me if indeed it were true) that daytime serials act as a window on the world providing them with usable social information. For, as I will discuss in the section on social learning, the stigma of TV viewing (particularly that of soap operas) is often too heavy for the more self-conscious viewer to publicly deal with in terms of the import of her viewing. So, I wasn't at all sure as to what significance an informant's discussion of what motivates her to continue viewing would have.

In reference to what I had anticipated, half of the informants (20) did indicate that they watched soap operas to be "relaxed" and/or "entertained". Similarly, only one informant noted that she watched soap operas in order "to learn". Of the remaining 19 respondents, 14 said they continued to watch because of interest in the stories' outcomes, 3 said they watched out of habit and 2 cited both interest in outcome and habit.

Although I will discuss other possible relationships later in this paper, I would now like to draw attention to the relationship between the above reasons and the earlier drawn Remote vs. Intimate paradigm.

Of the 20 informants who cited "relaxation/entertainment" as a continuing motivation, 15 were in the higher educational level group, and only five were members of the non-college group.

In terms of the college-educated informants, the relaxation/entertainment motive could be related to other patterns taken by this group. First, the college students in particular could often cite ways in which soap opera material served as a source of amusement:

Some of the things they come up with are so improbable that it's like watching science fiction. I mean it really becomes funny because if they're not doing these hysterical cliches, then they're inventing such outrageously funny material that sometimes you burst out laughing. Like once this villain or I should say villainess was trying to act as if she were high on some drug -- cocaine I think. It was really hysterical. I've never seen anything like it in my life. (Younger, College)

Secondly, the educated working women would sometimes note the relaxational aspects of the serials:

If I had a very trying morning at my job...like especially when I have an argument with my supervisor, I have this tendency to sulk and think about it and stew -- you know. So, what I do is go home and watch All My Children or something and since I probably haven't watched it for a couple of days, the business of trying to see if I missed anything sort of keeps my mind occupied. You know, it's relaxing because you have to pay some attention to it -- without, you know, really caring. It's sort of like a crossword puzzle.
(Older, College)

It is interesting to note that it is largely those viewers who were earlier labeled as having a more "remote" orientation vis-a-vis soap operas who also offered "entertainment/relaxation" as a continuing motive for viewing. Given that these informants are those who view fewer times per week, who are less likely to schedule activities around the serials, etc., it would seem reasonable to also assume that these same informants' main criterion for viewing is something other than interest in outcome or habit.

The more intimate-oriented respondents, on the other hand, did most frequently cite interest in outcome or habit as a continuing motivation. Not only would the more regular, more scheduled viewing habits of these informants seem to be complementary to such motivating factors, but also, it should seem logical that those informants who are closer to or more involved in the serials would be less likely to see the soap

operas as entertaining. Indeed, if this issue may be related to that of the specific appeals of soap operas compared to other TV fare, it should be noted that while the more highly educated informants said that they preferred soap operas to other programming, the less-educated respondents indicated that they preferred other types of programs. More specifically, those who preferred soap operas would often cite the serials' entertainment value,

Oh no show, with the possible exception of Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman -- which really isn't a soap opera, but a spoof on soap opera -- are really as entertaining as soap operas. I mean it takes a while to get used to them, but once you catch on, you can do stuff like start reciting dialogue before it actually happens. (Younger, College)

whereas those who did not prefer serials would point to other types of shows as being more entertaining:

Well, soap operas really aren't much fun, you know. I mean I love to watch Lawrence Welk or a special with Perry Como or someone like Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme. That's real entertainment! (Older, Non-college)

4. The Interactional Function of Soap Opera Viewing

In this section, we are again interested in two inter-related issues involving the use of soap opera material in real, everyday life. First, we will be concerned with the extent to which and the ways in which informants actually talk about soap operas in their more typical social interaction. Second, we will approach the issue of the soap opera serving the purpose of providing the informant with the ability to observe 'others' without explicit involvement. The first issue will be considered an 'explicit' interactional function, while the second will be labeled 'vicarious interaction'.

a. Explicit Function; Conversation

All of the informants reported that they talked to others about the soap operas they viewed. In almost all cases, these "others" were soap opera viewers themselves, and ordinarily, or perhaps logically, it would seem rather obvious to make such a point. However, given that supposed female ingenuousness is often mocked in satires -- most notably the movie Joe, in which the wife prattles on to her patronizing, non-viewing husband about the intricate relationships occurring among her soap opera characters -- it is important to note that only two women in this entire study indicated that they spoke of soap operas to non-

viewers. In fact, of these two women, one was a college student whose experience in discussing soap operas with non-viewers was limited to a presentation in a sociology seminar.

Now, the above is not offered to suggest that simply because most informants discuss soap operas only with other viewers that these women, therefore, don't treat the soap operas material as "gossip" much as Katzman suggests.²⁵

Indeed, if we explore the typical content of these conversations as reported by informants, we can see that the kinds of things that are discussed may be categorized as follows:

- 1) Story -- This classification refers to all comments and examples given by informants which indicated that the respondents' conversational style was akin to gossip e.g., "Isn't it a shame that Mary died?"
- 2) Catching-up -- This refers to the reported use of conversations for the purpose of determining what happened when a number of segments were missed by a viewer.

²⁵ Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas; What's Been Going on Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972) p. 205.

3) Treatment — This refers to indications by respondents that conversations are used to comment on the script and character portrayals, e.g., "how they dressed Tara in the wrong kinds of clothes."

Clearly, as far as possible conversations go, the above are not mutually exclusive possibilities. In fact, 17 informants reported that their conversations involved more than one of these classifications. More specifically, the act of "catching-up" is the most reported phenomenon, and of the six coding possibilities (the original three and all combinations²⁶) 20 informants indicated that their conversations involved "catching-up".

While there did not appear to be any major differences between the two age groups here, there is again indication of a remote vs. intimate distinction, which, as described before, relates quite closely to the education variable. The more remote viewers, generally the higher educated, did not cite conversations concerning the "story". If not involved in "catchin-up" conversations (three college respondents reported this as the only topic of conversation) the college-educated informants noted that they

²⁶

No informant reported engaging in all three types of conversation.

often engaged in analysis of the soap opera material with other viewers:

Well, I only have one friend who conscientiously watches the same serials as I and generally, because she's at home and watches more than I can, she tells me what I missed. And sometimes we can go on for long stretches of time about the kinds of things they're doing. You see, we talk about how they're playing up all this middle-class morality crap and trying to disguise it as reality. (College, Older)

On the other hand, of the informants in the non-college category, only two reported having conversations involving "treatment" issues. Clearly, aside from "catching-up", these respondents relied on the "story" itself for topics of conversation (15 out of 20 reported doing so):

Oh, all the time. Everyday. If one of us misses or something we'll call up one another and we'll discuss it. You feel sometimes as if it were your next-door-neighbor; why did they do this, or what thing is going to happen? (Younger, Non-college)

B. Vicarious Interaction

This issue is related to what Wiebe has described as "the sense of experience without the accomodation required in true participation."²⁷ Clearly, this is not an issue

²⁷ Gerhart D. Wiebe, "Two Psychological Factors in Media Audience Behavior" Public Opinion Quarterly (Winter, 1969).

that is easily investigated through interviews; for the informant, it not only requires a willingness to discuss, but a certain awareness of what is going on in her viewing situation. To at least tangentially deal with this phenomenon, all the informants were encouraged to discuss whether or not they thought watching soap operas is a good way to find out what the private lives of others are like. Informants' reactions here were of three types: First, there were those who indicated that soap opera viewing did permit a little voyeurism, so to speak:

A: I find them quite interesting. They're like normal lives of other people. You feel sometimes when you're watching it that it may be you sometimes too.

Q: Would you say that soap operas provide a good way to find out what the private lives of other people are like?

A: Right. Right. Exactly. (Younger, Non-college)

Second, there were informants who were unsure whether soap operas could serve this function:

You know, I often wonder about that. They say that writers have to draw on their own experiences to write, and sometimes -- well, of course, I don't worry for the characters -- but from the kinds of stories they have I am concerned about those writers. I mean, I don't know anybody with lives like that and to tell you the truth, I just have trouble believing that this is the way it may be like. I certainly can't

empathize, but who knows? Maybe other people do act like that. I hope not for their sakes. (Older, College)

Third, there were informants who claimed that soap operas absolutely did not have this potential:

A: Look, I watch these things to relax -- to get my mind off things. But no, I never have the sense that I'm getting a bird's eye view here. I guess I might have felt that way when I watched on Channel 12 -- that program about that family where the couple split up afterwards.

Q: An American Family?

A: Yeah. I mean there I sometimes felt a little guilty watching, but this? No way. I mean it's all fantasy. (Older, College)

Thirteen informants indicated that soap operas could provide something of a vicarious experience, and 12 of these viewers were in the non-college group. Eight informants questioned this possibility -- were unsure -- and three of these viewers were in the non-college group. The remaining 19 informants did not believe they could relate to soap operas in this fashion. Therefore, it seems to be the case that the more intimate, non-college informants are more prone to this type of relationship with soap operas.

5. The Cathartic Function of Soap Operas

As suggested in the preceding section, the extent to which a viewer laughs or cries in response to soap opera ongoings can be seen as an index of involvement. More specifically, laughing and crying may serve as an indication of actually suffering or enjoying along with the characters.

Of the 40 informants, 29 said they had either laughed and/or cried in reaction to soap opera events. However, because the reasons for crying may be so different from those causing laughter, it is essential that they be separately discussed.

Crying

Twenty-one informants said they never cried (or even felt immensely sad) in response to soap opera events. The remaining 19 respondents reported having cried on one or more occasions while viewing. Those who most frequently reported crying were the younger, non-college informants (8), followed by the older, non-college informants (5), the older, college informants (3) and the younger, college informants (3).

Since, unlike laughter, crying can only indicate some sort of emotional involvement with the material, it can be said that clearly some viewers do experience that level of interaction and that it more commonly occurred among the less-educated informants.

Laughing

Unlike crying, some of the informants demonstrated that laughter is not necessarily an index of personal involvement. Essentially, in analyzing this particular issue, the informants' responses are not simply categorizable on a yes/no level, but rather involve three, or depending on how one regards the data, possibly four distinct possibilities:

- 1) Never laughing
- 2) Story-Stimulus Laughing -- this refers to laughter that is in reaction to intentional events within the script. There are two main types of story-stimulus laughter (another type will be presented later in this report):
 - a) Comedy -- laughter that is in response to a joke told by one character to another, or to a cute or funny (intentionally pleasant) incident in the story:

I laughed once when Tad and his little dog were playing together. They seemed to be having so much fun. (Older, non-college)

I laughed at them when Phoebe Tyler was acting really crazy -- like a chicken without an egg -- I mean head. (Older, non-college)

- b) Triumph -- laughter that occurs usually when a villain and/or dislike character is 'found out', or receiving comeuppance:

You know when you can't help laughing? And it's really terrible, but when a really bad character gets put down. Like once I remember Erica was trying to charm the pants off somebody, you know, trying to wheedle them into doing something for her, but the person caught on and told her to forget it. I laughed. (Younger, Non-college)

- 3) Treatment-Stimulus Laughing -- this refers to laughter as a response to seemingly unintentional (unscripted) events; events that aren't supposed to be funny:

Sometimes I have an irritated "I don't believe it" laugh though. Like when in The Young and the Restless Brock was trying to turn his mother away from alcohol and onto religion. I mean I gasped-laughed when he broke out in the refrain from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". I laughed because they had the character seriously doing this like he was speaking lines. Or when Leslie and that guy -- Lance Prentiss -- that name kills me. It's their idea of a rich playboy's name. Anyway, they're sitting in a Parisian cafe and they seriously start to sing, in harmony yet, "I Love Paris" to each other. If I remember, I was in hysterics. (Younger, College)

Of the 40 informants, 12 reported that they never laughed when viewing soap operas. This figure in and of itself is quite intriguing when one considers the fact that of these same 40 informants, 20 said they never cried. In other words, more respondents reported being moved to laughter than to tears. That which is interesting here, of course, is the

popular notion that daytime serials are in the "tear-jerking" dramatic tradition. Certainly, this is not to suggest that an overwhelming majority of events occurring in these serials are not more often tragicomic than comedic. In fact, this sample of viewers may be idiosyncratic in terms of their responses here, but the possibility also exists that despite the less-than-happy atmosphere perpetuated on soap operas, those moments that might actually move a viewer to activate expressible sentiment might be more jubilant than we had imagined.

Returning then to the 12 informants who reported never to laugh, there was absolutely no difference between the educational groups. On the other hand, the difference here was a function of the age variable, i.e., while only four younger informants reported not laughing, eight older respondents indicated that they never found anything particularly funny in soap operas.

However, the biggest difference in terms of laughter classifications occurs in terms of the two educational groups with respect to the 28 informants who said they did indeed laugh while viewing soap operas. Of the 14 college informants in this group, three only laughed at story-stimulus events, one at both story and treatment-stimulus events, but ten only over treatment issues. On the other hand, in terms of the same number of non-college informants in this group (14), only three reported ever laughing over treatment-type issues. For the remaining 11

non-college informants then, it was events in the story per se that triggered their laughter.

While the significance of the story vs. treatment distinction will be discussed later in this report, it is interesting to note that it is not simply the case that the more educated respondents do not usually respond to story events. For, if one regards the crying issue, it can be remembered that six college informants did report crying -- and the assumption here is that all crying is story stimulated. (No informant indicated that she spilled tears of grief in response to the 'manner' in which a serial was produced.) So, while both in terms of laughing and crying, the non-college informants were more inclined to become directly 'involved' with the soap opera action, the college informants, for the most part, only seemed to experience this involvement in terms of crying only.²⁸

²⁸ It might be interesting to note that the college-educated informants who did report crying usually cited death scenes as the motivating factors (i.e., as opposed to unhappiness in love, and so on). One informant independently suggested that she was not crying "over" the character's death, but because any portrayal of death reminded her of a rather recent family crisis.

6. Soap Operas and Social Learning

The label "social learning" has the potential to account for a vast array of behavioral activities, and unfortunately, this section cannot cover all the implications that daytime serials may have in terms of contributing to their viewers' general worldviews. The seriousness of this problem will be more fully recognized in the concluding chapter of this report. For the present, this section can be said to focus on the articulable types of information and/or knowledge that may be gained from soap opera viewing. In addition to discussing the specific nature of this information, this section will also introduce an analysis of the problems involved in attempting to question viewers about the extent of their "television learning".

The Issue of Self-Report in Terms of Social Learning

In designing this study, this section, or more specifically, the issue that is represented by this section along with the next section on social adjustment, was probably considered the most important in terms of the entire uses and gratifications investigation. It seemed that ultimately all the other issues approached in this research would be important to the extent that they could be viewed in relationship to the issue of how informants are socially educated or socialized by the events portrayed in daytime serials. Clearly, the issue of

social learning is central to most social science research involving television viewing, i.e., of what significance is the collection of data on television content and viewing behavior unless there is an underlying assumption that there is some sort of "effect" operating? With this simple but still very important assumption in mind, it was essential therefore to explore the learning uses to which soap opera 'information' might be applied by viewers. The problem was getting to that data.

When this study was initiated, I thought it might be impossible to obtain informants -- particularly those with college educations. The stigma, I thought, was perhaps too deeply rooted -- especially in those who had intellectual pretensions to maintain -- to admit soap opera viewing publicly. Although I did not have unimpeachable data on this issue, I was well aware that as I walked down the halls of the graduate students' apartment complex at the University of Pennsylvania (the complex in which I resided while doing the bulk of the interviews) one would be just as likely to hear American daytime serial dialogue as the sounds of Walter Cronkite or Jean Marsh in her Upstairs Downstairs PBS series.²⁹ On the

²⁹ This is not meant to imply that Cronkite or PBS presentations are either more intellectually stimulating or aesthetically pleasing than daytime serials. Indeed, it might be argued that The Forsyte Saga, Upstairs Downstairs and the like are simply soap operas with British accents. Clearly, the point here deals with social acceptability.

other hand, I also imagined that if I were asking to interview news and/or PBS viewers, I would have had many more volunteers.³⁰

While this may or may not have been the case -- and it could be interesting to investigate this issue in and of itself -- the fact is that in response to advertisements in campus buildings and in the student newspaper for daytime serial viewers, more than four times the amount of need informants responded. So, essentially, this aspect of acquiring informants posed no real problems.

Yet, there was another problem I had anticipated which could only be borne out after some interviews were completed. Essentially, this problem involved the willingness, or indeed the ability, of informants to discuss soap opera ongoings as a source of social learning. While viewers may be willing to discuss such things as whether or not they prefer viewing alone, how they began viewing soap operas, even whether or not they laugh or cry, there still remained a more direct, socially sensitive level of interrogation. In a world intellectually crowded with beliefs of the individual's autonomy from social forces (beliefs that are ultimately propagated by the philosophy of individualism underlying this society's economic system) who indeed was going to state (if, in fact, they knew)

³⁰ Of course, it could be argued that asking for television viewers of any sort among 'educated' individuals might cause problems.

that their worldview, their everyday behavior was being (continuously) influenced by the world presented to them on soap operas, or even on television in general? It seemed perhaps that interviewing methods on these sorts of issues were futile and that the more indirect parallels drawn through studies such as those conducted by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in the "Cultivation Analysis" of the ongoing "Cultural Indicators" research might be the only types of projects that could in any way cogently point to the dynamics of learning from television.³¹

With these sorts of issues in mind, a set of four major questions were designed to at least test what might be accomplished through an interview situation. It was hoped that the rather casual, conversation-like format, combined with the knowledge that the interviewer, herself, was a daytime serial follower, would ameliorate some of the anticipated problems of willingness to report. These four questions were as follows:

- 1) What sort of problems or issues or situations do you like to see treated on soap operas?
- 2) Did you ever come across a situation on any of the soap operas you watch that you or anyone else you know had also come across?

³¹ George Gerbner and Larry Gross. "Living with Television; The Violence Profile" Journal of Communication (Spring, 1976).

- 3) Can you talk about any stories or episodes that were important to you because they showed you what to do in a particular situation?
- 4) Did you ever try out some of the advice or solutions to problems provided by a soap opera? If so, what happened? Would you look to the soap operas for advice again? If not, do you think you ever would?

These four questions were usually presented in just that order in the actual interview format. The strategy behind this ordering was simply that it seemed that the point of the questions (and essentially all deal with the notion of soap operas as a learning experience) became increasingly more obvious. Because of this progressive transparency, it seemed that the responses to the first questions might, therefore, be more meaningful than those which follow, i.e., they seem to be less suspect with regard to informant bias because at that earlier point (where the question's objective might not yet be clear) there would have been less cause to falsify. Saving the potentially more meaningful for last, therefore, the following discussion will consider these questions in reverse order.

Taking Advice

All informants were asked if they ever tried out any of the advice or solutions to problems offered in soap operas. Of the 40

informants, only four said that they had done so and interestingly, these four were composed of one informant from each age/educational level:

When I was in high school, some soap opera -- I don't remember which one -- had an episode about a girl who got pregnant out of wedlock. And she had a lot of sorrow and everything and I thought "gee, that really taught me a lesson". I really worried about her and thought "I'll never let that happen to me". But then, I was still going to a Catholic high school and thought that I should stay a virgin until I got married. (Younger, College)

There is one thing. It is Dr. Davis and her daughter. The type of relationship she hadn't had with the daughter when she was younger made her turn away from her when she was older. I mean she had been sort of cold to her. My daughter's the same age, and it made me want to become closer to her now then to wait and try to become closer to her later, I've tried this with my daughter and it works. (Younger, Non-college)

Yeah, like maybe about raising a child. Sometimes you get a little pointer from them. (Older, Non-college)

Well, this is peculiar, and I can't say that no one else at the time was telling me this, but when I was separated from my husband, there was this story going on that was something like it. And everyone kept telling this girl "don't chase him, he'll come back". Well, it was kind of interesting watching it and actually seeing it. That is exactly what I did. It worked. (Older, College)

It might also be noted that of the four informants cited above, all indicated that if the situation arose, they would be willing to take advice again.

The fact is, nonetheless, that the overwhelming majority of informants (36) answered "no" to the advice-taking question, and such responses were sometimes delivered with a friendly "how could, and how could you ask such a thing?" statement:

No. There'd be no similarities or identifications to justify it. Furthermore, even if identification did occur, I would hardly accept those insipid writers' advice or solutions, I mean, that world in no way approximates reality. (Younger, College)

Of the 36 respondents who said that they had never taken advice, 28 indicated in their follow-up statements that not only had they never looked toward the soap opera for solutions to problems, but that they never would. The eight informants who said they have never taken any advice, but might in the future were comprised thusly: three older, non-college, two older, college, two younger, non-college, and one younger, college.

Superficially, even given the small numbers, one might consider an age effect here given the fact that more older informants indicated willingness to accept advice from soap operas. Indeed, this effect might be related to something I shall label "media fear".

Certainly, any contemporary researcher doing work in the area of soap opera viewing must to some degree be in awe of Herzog's success in terms of getting her informants to 'open up' with regard to the personal issues of identification and social learning. Granted, much of Herzog's findings are a result of psychiatric inference on her part, yet there seems to be a level of ingenuousness (or better stated, non-paranoia) manifested in the responses of her 1942 radio listeners:

They teach you how to be good. I have gone through a lot of suffering but I still can learn from them.

or

I learn a lot from these stories. I often figure if anything like that happened to me what I would do. Who knows if I met a crippled man, would I marry him? If he had money I would. In this story (Life Can Be Beautiful), he was a lawyer so it was really quite nice. These stories teach you how things come out all right. ³²

Although it cannot be proven, it seems doubtful that the difference (in terms of 'openness') between Herzog's radio listeners and those viewers in this study is even largely a function of interviewing style. Rather, I'd like to suggest that the media

³² Herta Herzog. "What We Know about Daytime Serial Listeners" Radio Research, 1942-3 (1944), pp. 29-30.

awareness to which younger parents or potential parents are being exposed in terms of the 'influence' of violence and/or sex (even if some of it is a false awareness) must to some extent be considered a factor here. Since most of the publicity about the media's influence -- their ability to subtly teach -- is usually couched in terms of its effect on children or 'criminal types', it seems logical that adults with this media awareness might be careful not to indict themselves as 'learners' and thereby categorize themselves as innocents along with the children. Moreover, this general idea may be extended to explain why Herzog's informants seemed to be generally more 'cooperative' in this regard; they had probably not learned that to "open up" might result in this sort of indictment. Indeed, the population's general sophistication toward the media and media research in general has probably significantly changed over the past 35 years. Therefore, it can be suggested that one reason the older viewers might have been less reluctant to hypothetically take advice is because their 'media conditioning', so to speak, has not so much involved this issue of "awareness", effects, and so forth.

However, there is one mitigating factor. While it is true that members of the older group comprised over half of the 11 women who said that they have taken or would take advice from soap operas, there was a distinct difference between the reasons the college

and non-college groups (regardless of age) gave in terms of the conditions that need be met in order for the soap operas to act as advice-givers. Considering only the women who said they had never taken, but might in the future take advice, those in the college group tended to stress realism as a condition which would have to be met:

Well, maybe I would if there was something that was progressing along normal lines -- you know, something that I could sink my teeth into. But so far, nothing has ever hit me like that. It all seems so far removed.
(Older, College)

Informants in the non-college group usually indicated that in order for them to take advice, the given soap opera would need to deal with a specific problem with which they specifically identified. Their general position was simply that they were glad not to need any advice:

I probably would -- to see if my problems would be solved like theirs. Hopefully, it should never happen to me. (Younger, Non-College)

Now, it could be argued that this is a false distinction -- that soap operas aren't realistic to some people precisely because they don't deal with problems to which an average person can relate. However, I would suggest that this argument is at least partially untrue -- that there are other elements in daytime serials which might be seen as taking away from their realism -- and that this issue can be more fully discussed under the heading "Identification"

to appear later in this section.

Models of Interaction

Informants were asked if they might talk about any daytime serial episodes that were important to them because they were shown what to do in a particular situation. Certainly, this sort of question is not all that different from the 'advice-taking' question, but it was felt that this approach was somewhat more indirect than the other (and it should be remembered that in the interviewing format, this question precede that of the 'advice-taking' one.)

If, in terms of content or objective, this question is the same as the 'advice-taking' question, then the previously proposed idea (that the informants' willingness to answer such questions decreases with the transparency of the line of investigation) is substantiated here. More specifically, whereas 29 informants claimed that they would never and have never taken advice from soap operas, here, only 22 informants indicated that there were no episodes in daytime serials that ever "showed them what to do". However, there are two ways in which one can regard these "models of interaction" data, and in order to describe both sets of data, a new element that arose in the interviewing situation must now be described.

Earlier, it was noted that in considering pertinent data for any given issue, it would be necessary to regard the interview as a whole. It was also argued, on the other hand, that in order to investigate certain methodological issues, it is sometimes interesting to regard specific answers to individual questions. Most interview discussions pertinent to the "social learning" section were more or less self-contained, i.e., informants unknowingly confined their comments on identification, advice-taking, and so forth to that time period in the interview which was specifically designated to explore such issues. This may indicate (as suggested earlier) a general reluctance to discuss such issues so that these topics are only discussed when the interviewees are directly confronted with them.

However, a different strategy of answering questions began to emerge usually after the first "social learning" question (nature of problems). This strategy involved what will be labeled as the "disclaimer". The disclaimer is characterized by a "Well, I don't ordinarily do this, but..." approach. In other words, as soon as the questions involving social learning started to become too transparent, many informants, seemingly wanting to be helpful, would claim not to do something that their next or soon-to-be-made statements might suggest:

No, I don't learn anything from a soap opera. Oh, occasionally you'll get a pointer or two, but you don't really get any help. (Older, Non-college)

From a methodological standpoint, this disclaimer phenomenon is quite important in that one is left with two levels of data: first, there is the immediate response (i.e., usually a general statement to the effect that learning does not take place) and secondly, the follow-up response that negates the preface. It should also be mentioned that beside the disclaimer, there were occasions in which a respondent would give an immediate negative response to a learning issue, but would later in the interview demonstrate one or more instances in which she practiced something learned from a soap opera. ³³

This, of course, makes it somewhat difficult to code the interviews in that, on one level at least, a no-then-yes answer, so to

³³ It might be argued that these sort of data -- informants indicating learning experiences in another section of the interview -- is also pertinent to the preceding section on "advice-taking. For the most part, it was an arbitrary decision to include these data in this discussion rather than in the previous one, because, as I have noted elsewhere, although the two questions are being separately analyzed for methodological purposes, they do tend to cover the same theoretical territory. The one less arbitrary reason for the disclaimer phenomenon to be discussed in this section is that the "models of interaction" question was found to accommodate more of the informants' experiences than was the more specifically-worded "advice-taking" question.

speak, is somewhat different from an unequivocal "yes" or unchanged "no" response. In order to present an organized view of these data, therefore, I shall in the next several pages give an overview of the kinds of useful social information soap operas seem to provide in general. Following this overview, I shall then discuss specific variations among informants.

Essentially, when one considers the kind of learning that might result from viewing soap operas, one might immediately consider the fact that daytime serials inevitably revolve around a great deal of romantic and familial relationships. Because of this then, one might hypothesize that the kind of learning that results is one that refers to treatment of romantic and/or family-type problems. However, in their interview, informants indicated various types of soap opera material from which learning might take place. This material was organized into three categories: social issues, practical information, and specific interpersonal problems.

Social Issue Learning -- Since the late 1960's when the issue of 'relevancy' became generally fashionable, it seems that most television drama, including daytime serials, wanted to incorporate into their plots the 'problems facing the world today'. In soap operas specifically, these 'relevant' issues take on a quality of what I shall call "promotional superimposition". In other words, a given soap opera will seemingly

latch on to a current social problem and then inject it into the story in such a way so that its narrative quality is something akin to a public service announcement. These portrayals can usually be differentiated from a non-social issue sub-plot in one or more of the following ways. First, the portrayal of 'social issues' sometimes involves temporary actors whose characters remain in the serial only as long as the issue is being considered. Second, the issue is often not a running sub-plot as many other story-lines are; it is usually conceived in a relatively short, solid time-block (e.g., one or two months). Third, it is often the case that if relatively permanent characters are directly involved in the 'issue' at hand, their basic character and personal problems remain virtually unchanged -- the issue usually only exists for the duration of its presentation. Lastly, it is sometimes the case that the serial will offer methods of contacting real-life agencies established to deal with the given 'issue' -- similar to public service announcements and quite different from the context in which non-issue problems are presented.

One example that demonstrates this "promotional superimposition" may be taken from the serial All My Children. The 'issue' was child abuse and its promotion went as follows: A major character ("poor-little-rich-girl") regretted her rather aimless,

aimless, yet opulent existence. She began working as a volunteer in a hospital and took a liking to an abused child-patient. The child's parents (new characters) were also wealthy and frivolous and with the help of the major character (who, among other things, began working for the hospital's child abuse center) started to overcome their abuse-giving problems. Much of the dialogue in these segments amounted to the watered-down reading of statistics showing how anyone could be a child abuser and there was much urging to the effect that parents should not be ashamed of this problem and should go out and seek help. In fact, at the conclusion of these segments, the local phone numbers of real-life child-abuse centers were given. Of course, the serial has not since seen the abused child and/or his parents and the volunteer worker has since dropped out of the program to become a mother. Interestingly, her child was born retarded and, in addition, went on to die a "crib death". Here, plot-wise, the interpersonal narrative element involved the strained relationship between a husband and wife as a result of a newborn needing attention, and, any variety of problems might have been superimposed on this family constellation. However, the issue of retardation and "crib death" were specifically selected and given publicity.

In other soap operas, women have mastectomies (that are

later seemingly forgotten) but the issue of breast cancer and plugs for the American Cancer Society and even directions on how to perform breast examinations are briefly covered. Rape, alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking, the Vietnam War and prostitution are just a few of the 'social issues' which have been recently covered in just All My Children and The Young and the Restless.

The point of elaborating on the nature of the 'social issue' material is to point out the kind of 'factual' information that can be learned by viewers. The following examples demonstrate the issue-learning phenomenon.

...they might say what Alcoholics Anonymous did for someone and that might give you a little extra push to say "well, maybe it really does work."
(Younger, College)

I don't know of anybody, but it is still a big help when they discuss the rapes -- where you can find out information and what to do and things like that. That's a big help to young girls or even older women. (Younger, Non-college)

Well, I was pretty intrigued by the bit about toxiplasmosis. To tell the truth, I thought it was a bit bizzare for them to give Anne that disease. I mean I was interested because I knew someone who had it and you know, they (the serial) sort of described how you get it and all, and what it can do. It was pretty informative for a soap opera. (Older, College)

Practical Learning -- This type of learning is one where the viewer learns how to perform a specific task after it has been enacted on a serial. It distinguishes itself from 'social issue' learning because the information gained has a more immediate, pragmatic function. Also, it is unlike 'problem-solving' learning (to be discussed next) in that it does not relate to one very specific interpersonal problem, but rather to the acquisition of a general ability to do something. The following excerpts may help to illustrate this phenomenon:

Something else I pay close attention to always are the little social amenities -- things that people just happen to say when they come in the door, when they greet each other, people come in for the first time to a party, somebody is pouring his or her heart out to another person and wants to say the right thing. I'm a little bit clumsy about things like that once in a while. I don't know what it is that you say. I just don't see people sometimes for long stretches of time, so how it is you say the sort of thing that makes strangers at ease...Well, I think soap operas, to some extent, teach good manners. They certainly are mannerly. (Younger, College)

When Tony Vincent (a character) was having a heart attack, Stephanie punched his heart. That helped me because I work with Nurses' Aid in church. (Younger, Non-college)

This is going to sound really strange and I suppose I shouldn't admit it, but there is something I watch for. You know, I'm divorced, and while I look very young -- well, I'm not really old -- well anyway,

I date pretty frequently. But as I said, when I was a teenager before I got married, girls weren't supposed to be at all aggressive -- sexually I mean. I suppose I was never very good at the game. I mean a lot of time I'd like somebody and not know how to show it. Now, I'm running into the same sort of thing again, and as I said, I wasn't raised with Women's Lib. And, although I think it's good, I can't just say to somebody "Hey, I'd like to -- you know". Well, a lot of the women characters on soap operas are not really aggressive, but they're much more devious than I'd think to be. So, I watch them in situations with men who they want to have a relationship with and I watch how they engineer these situations. Unfortunately, in soap operas, it's still usually the men who are the aggressors, so I don't get too many pointers. (Older, College)

Well, I kind of remember parts when people had been sick -- like in All My Children when the grandmother had the collapse because she couldn't breathe when she was eating. I thought that was interesting. I think it's interesting to know how to act if you were to find yourself in a situation like that. I think it's interesting to know what to do. (Younger, Non-college)

Specific Problem Solving -- Viewers may have or anticipate having a specific interpersonal problem with which they are trying to cope. Sometimes the soap opera will appear to dramatize that specific problem and the viewer uses the information inherent in that dramatization to help solve her problem. For example:

I was interested in any soap opera which involved adultery and showed the other woman trying to cope with her position with some dignity -- not where the other woman is a villainess, but where she was good and just happened to fall into the situation. I watched very closely how it was that the other woman happened to cope -- how she managed to maintain some dignity and to fend off the misunderstanding of other people. You see, I was in that other-woman position and I was having a very difficult time handling it. (Younger, College)

In Another World the daughter went and got birth control and the mother, you know -- handled it right and showed me some things in terms of my own daughters when they grow up, (Younger, Non-college)

Well, yes. My husband and I have a very good marriage, but there was always one problem for me; sometimes he spends too much time with his work. Mind you, I don't say this because I'm lonesome or anything, but you know he's not a young man anymore and I don't think it's healthy for him to be so wrapped up in his business so much. So, in one of my soaps there was this woman with a very similar problem; her husband, who also wasn't a very young man, was a doctor and he was constantly making housecalls and worrying about everybody but his own family. Now, she seemed like an intelligent woman, so I watched to see what she would do to make her husband stay at home more. (Older, Non-college)

All the excerpts used to illustrate reports of either issue, practical or problem-solving learning are taken from informants who did not equivocate when asked for an instance in which they learned something from a soap opera. However, as noted previously,

many informants were less than straightforward with regard to this matter. There were informants who claimed never to have an experience of this type and whose earlier and subsequent comments never seemed to contradict this assertion. In these cases, the informants' rationales were generally of the same order:

Showed me what to do? No, because in soap operas they never really handle anything. With them, it is never "well, we've got a problem, let's sit down and figure out what we're gonna do." They can't do that because that would take up one day. That would be useless. Therefore, the solutions to their problems are never just simple. They're always very drawn out and complicated-type things. I can usually sit down and come up with a solution to my problems and it doesn't take me a month to do it. (Younger, Non-college)

No. I trust myself much more than them. (Older College)

You see, I can't relate to that at all 'cause I don't see myself in that situation. I don't see them solving my problems. I see them as having their own problems and dealing with their own problems. O.K., I'll give you one. Let's say I've been going with a guy for two months and the question is in my own mind 'should I go out with other people?' What would I do? If they would want to deal with that, that would be fine. But I don't even think that even if I saw it on the screen like that, that it would dawn on me that I was in a similar situation. (Younger, College)

Q: Can you tell me about any stories or episodes that were important to you because they showed you what to do in a particular situation?

A: No. Now you're going a little bit too far. I use it for entertainment and that is all. I'm not likening my life or I'm not going to follow it. And I'm not going to learn a lesson from it. It's purely just a story.³⁴ (Older, Non-college)

We have seen now two classes of response to this learning issue (unequivocal yesses and no's). The third type of response is that which is marked by the previously described "disclaimer". In the following excerpt, the informant discusses social issue or practical learning while framing the whole response with the implication that she could never use soap operas for problem-solving purposes:

I don't think the people on soap operas could ever show me what to do in particular situations. Sometimes they have different things on like different people you could contact for help. That way they show me where to look for it if I need that particular type of help. But as far as what to do, their lives are so different from mine, so I could never really look and say "this is a way to handle this situation". I'd have to think it out myself. (Younger, Non-college)

³⁴ It might be noted that this informant's statement seemed to be the most adamant in regard to one's inability to learn from material presented on soap operas.

In the next excerpt, the informant implies that learning is something derived through a positive model. The particular issue which she addresses (that of concealment or the hiding of problems) is seemingly one of the most frequent lessons taught by soap operas -- even though it is generally demonstrated through negative example:

I don't run my life by what I see in the soap operas at all. If anything, it's exactly the opposite. A big thing on soap operas is how people can get messed up by not talking to each other...misunderstandings by hiding the truth from somebody. Like somebody hiding the truth that they are pregnant or something like that. And I've stopped and said "Yeah, that wasn't too cool." when they're doing it. Or I'll say to myself or if somebody's in the room "They're gonna get in trouble. They should have opened up."
(Younger, College)

The following excerpt could be considered a straight disclaimer followed by contradictory data:

Oh no! They could never mean anything to me like that. I mean you can't treat them that seriously. I mean sometimes in a roundabout way they might hit on something that you can use. Like once -- this is really crazy -- I noticed that this lady on one show had a really good way of gettin people to tell her secrets. What she would do is if she suspected a special thing, she would start to talk about it as if she knew for sure. You know what I mean? And then the person she was talking to would start to tell her things because they thought "What the heck. She already knows anyhow." Well, I've used that on a couple of occasions and it works. But you can't watch them seriously to learn things.
(Older, Non-college)

In this next excerpt, we can see a pattern which emerged in two other interview; the framing of a soap opera experience in terms of a friend or relative. Actually, there are two varieties of this response. The first type is one in which the informant indicates that she, herself, does not do X, but that she knows that others do:

I personally don't get anything out of them, but I know other women do. God, my mother-in-law is always quoting advice from this or that soap opera. (Older, College)

The second type is one in which the informants find soap opera material to be a suitable basis of instruction for others:

When you're in love with another man and you're married. That hasn't touched my home, but my sister who's in that situation now. And I tell her "Hurry up. Turn on the set now and you'll see what to do when your husband is wondering and you want to be with your boyfriend." It might give her ideas about what you say when you want to be with your boyfriend and still keep your husband. What do you say when you want to go out to lunch and you never normally go out to lunch and you want to be with your boyfriend for a few hours? In the story they tell you things to say and come up with things real tactfully -- a shopping spree or having a luncheon. (Young, Non-college)

³⁵ This type of response is not just germane to social learning issues, but to other questions in which the informant seemingly wants to let you know that she's aware of all the possibilities although she, herself, is in control.

Considering all the above discussion, it is important to note that at that point in the interview at which informants were asked whether soap opera material had ever been personally useful to them, almost half (18) reported that it had not. These informants did not seem to indicate -- through disclaimers or elsewhere in the interview -- instances that would contradict their negative responses. Eleven of these 18 informants were in the college group, but there was absolutely no difference between the older and younger informants in this respect.

Interestingly, of the 22 informants who did cite instances in which soap operas were instructional, so to speak, the interviews of the younger informants show more contradictory statements (usually in the form of disclaimers) than did those in the 35 and over group. However, the educational distinction did not seem to be a significant predictor of whether or not the informant would make such contradictory statements. Possibly, the difference here in terms of the age variable relates to the idea presented earlier in this discussion -- that of "media fear", i.e., perhaps the older informants were somewhat less intimidated by the idea of being influenced by television.

Considering the instances specifically cited by these 22 informants -- and recognizing that an informant was encouraged to cite as many instances as she wished -- there does seem to be certain differences among the "types" of learning mentioned.

Of the three categories, social issues, practical information, and problem solving — social issues was the class least pointed to and problem solving was referred to most.

One might wish to have data on whether or not the educational and/or age variables were distinguishable in terms of these three categories. However, when one considers that of these 22 informants, nine were in the college group, whereas 13 were in the non-college group, the distinctions become less meaningful. Given this limitation, it can be noted that while members of the college group were almost uniformly distributed in each of the three learning categories, informants in the non-college group seemed to be more inclined to cite instances of practical or problem-solving learning.

Identification

Before answering questions concerning advice-taking or instructional episodes in soap operas, informants discussed whether or not they had ever seen any problem or situation in a soap opera that had also affected them or anyone else they knew. Although this question is not exactly opaque in its objective, it was considered less threatening, so to speak, in that if the informant so desired, she could couch any identification in terms of "others". On whatever level the informant chooses, this issue seems important. It seems reasonable to suggest that to the ex-

tent that an individual identifies with the problems portrayed in the serials, the greater the possibility of learning from the serials' treatment of those problem situations.

With this question, only 14 informants said that they never saw any similarities between their real-life experiences and those portrayed in the serials. Of these 14 informants, only one was in the older, non-college group. The remaining informant conditions contained either four or five individuals who claimed that they could not identify with the material.

However, aside from just the frequency of negative response here, there was another way in which these 14 informants differed in terms of the education variable. The more highly educated informants when discussing their lack of identification would tend to stress formal rather than narrative (content) reasons for their inability to relate:

No. I suppose one of the reasons I watch soaps to begin with is because that element is excluded from the start. I mean, by definition, soap operas deal with these almost surrealistic -- well, no -- but outrageous situations that no one has. I mean their whole method of organizing reality is bizarre. I think they'd be quite painful to watch if they weren't like this. In fact, they would not be soap operas to me.
(Older, College)

The less-educated informants, on the other hand, would usually indicate that it was not the inherent nature of the soap opera,

per se, but rather, the specific material presented that accounted for their lack of identification:

Gee, let me think now. Gee, not really. Most of the people that I know their problems are wife beating, and they haven't got that into the show as yet because it's just starting to come to the surface. So most of my friends, if they had any problems, it wasn't abortion or drugs or not knowing who you ought to marry so you take a chance and marry him anyway and get a divorce three weeks later. So, I would say no. None of the friends that I have have their problems on the soaps. Not my problems either. (Young, Non-college)

Interestingly, considering the 26 informants who did indicate some level of identification, there was no real distinction between those who referred to "others" and those who referred to themselves. Actually, most informants did refer to both themselves and others they knew. Perhaps because this question only involves identification (outwardly) rather than learning, per se, informants were able to be less hesitant in terms of discussing their own perceptions.

With regard to this question, the only difference among informants involved the degree to which a respondent would identify with specific elements in soap operas. In other words, while some informants would cite soap opera situations that were particularly relevant to their own lives, others would suggest only general similarities. The difference can be seen as follows:

Specific Identifications:

Well, the part -- with my own family. I've got foster children and their parents did not want them, so I happened to be the mother that took these children. And they were looking for a home for these children and it was just like the story if you go on. When I saw it I said "Christine, this is our situation right there -- what we're doing." (Older, Non-college)

Yeah. When Erica's baby died because she had a miscarriage. One of my friends had a miscarriage and she flaked out like Erica and they had to send her to a psychiatrist too. (Younger, Non-college)

General Identifications:

Well, the main plot problems are sort of eternal aren't they? The eternal triangle, loving someone who doesn't love you, falling out of love with a man that you don't know how to tell the fact to. (Younger, College)

Oh, not that I can think of. Of course, separation, divorce, arguments -- this is a very common thing -- but nothing specific. (Older, Non-college)

For the most part, the 26 informants who said they saw elements of their own lives in soap operas had a tendency to express the generalized level of identification (17). However, of the eight informants who suggested more specific relationships, seven were in the non-college group. In other words, the more highly educated informants were more inclined to note general similarities than were those in the less-educated group.

On one hand, it might be argued that although the soap operas largely portray upper-middle class individuals (most families in serials are supported by professionals) it may also be the case that the constellation of problems presented are more similar to those of the working class (often the less educated). Hence, this might explain why the non-college informants were more inclined to specific identification. On the other hand, it can probably be more reasonably argued that there is such a potpourri of problems in daytime serials that if one were explicitly or tacitly looking to identify, identification could certainly be established. As one ambivalent informant said:

Yes and no. I mean one might share a general problem, but the motivations and the elaborateness of the soap opera situation usually makes it unidentifiable. I mean you'd have to force it, but I suppose it could be done.
(Younger, College)

Therefore, it is difficult to establish with certainty whether identification is a function of real similarities or whether it is derived from a certain viewing perspective. If we assume that it's more the latter than the former, we can say that more than half of the informants recognize their ability to identify, and more specifically, that the less-educated informant seems to make this process more personal than the more-educated viewer.

At this point, it would be interesting to look at some data

collected later in the interview. Informants were then specifically asked whether they preferred to see situations more similar to or more different from their own. Interestingly, there seems to be something of a contradiction between this issue of preference and the patterns of identification. More specifically, more non-college informants -- particularly the older women -- expressed a desire to see soap opera situations that were different from their own lives than did the college informants. Yet, it is these women who reported seeing more similarities -- indeed, specific similarities -- between their lives and events portrayed in daytime serials.

This contradiction may relate back to the issue of "continuing motivation. There, we remember, while the college informants largely reported watching soap operas for their "entertainment" value, the non-college informants expressed other ideas -- particularly interest in outcome. Along with this, while college-educated informants later indicated that they preferred soap operas to other TV fare, the non-college informants, for the most part, expressed a preference for other kinds of shows. Therefore, it may indeed be the case that the less-educated informants are being less 'frivolously entertained' by the soap operas (i.e., to the extent that television has the capacity to do simply this) by virtue of the fact that for them, there is a more intensive identification process going on.

Nature of Problems

The first and seemingly least transparent of the questions, the aim of which was to explore the learning phenomenon, was that of asking the informants to indicate the type of problems or situations they preferred seeing on soap operas. Perhaps it is assuming too much, but it could be suggested that unless the informants were to have uniformly offered themes which are somewhat bizzare in terms of everyday life (e.g., the crime dramas, the peculiar diseases, the out-of-wedlock, but intentional pregnancies, etc.) the responses to this question might be very informative in terms of the whole identification/learning phenomenon. Of course, this is not to imply that if informants were to note preferences for the crime dramas and so on that this would not also be informative. However, it was thought that the informants' preferences for 'stories' might signal those that are the most useful (in one way or another) to them.

Of the 40 informants, only four indicated that they had no preferences with regard to the content of their serials. All four of these informants were in the non-college group.

Therefore, 36 informants expressed fairly specific preferences for what they like to see portrayed on soap operas. Essentially, their preferences can be categorized as follows:

- 1) Contemporary Issues -- There are two ways in which informants said they wanted to see 'relevant' issues worked into the plot:

A. Public Service Information -- Here, viewers expressed a desire to see the kind of "promotional" stories previously described. As noted, these sorts of issues are fairly specific and often are not entirely integrated into the soap opera's continuous plot structure:

Well, I do think the child abuse on All My Children was good. It sort of made you see there is a sort of real-life thing. You hear about. You read about it. But watching it sort of made it more true. There was another thing brought into one of the soap operas -- it was the rape. Yeah, that sort of thing showed you. Seeing that she was the victim, yet she was being victimized. (Younger, Non-college)

B. Ideologically Motivated Interpersonal Relationships -- Here, informants said that instead of seeing shallow, discrete presentations promoting a given concern, they simply wanted more mundane social issues to become a working part of the plot development:

Well, let me think. I mean some of the things they do well. For, example, like on All My Children, I would like to see something happen to Frank Grant. I mean obviously here's this one Black family in the entire town of Pine Valley and there has been no friction. Everyone loves him and that's absurd. I'd like to see them treat that a little more realistically. (Young, College)

2. Non-Ideological Interpersonal Relationships -- There are three categories to be considered here:

A. General Male/Female Relationships:

With men -- like on Search For Tomorrow with John Wyatt and Jennifer and Stephanie. That is something I can relate to. I like to see the pettiness between women. (Young, Non-college)

B. Marriage and Family:

Well, I'm interested in the role of women in marriage. I'm newly married and I married late. I'm Interested in seeing a woman who had worked. (Older, College)

C. Sex:

I like the stories that have to do with sex. I mean I love the way the writers handle things. I mean its always a momentous decision whether to bed down with someone. (Younger, College)

3. Criminal Intrigue:

Well, I like their courtroom dramas. That I enjoy listening to. We got a lot of that on The Edge of Night. I mean the actors, they really play a sincere part. It isn't just a sob story. (Older, Non-college)

There are several interesting aspects of the informants' reports regarding the kinds of problems or situations they prefer viewing. Basically, there are three issues requiring discussion here: 1) interview methodology, 2) attitudes toward contemporary issues, and 3) the relationship between story preference and social learning.

Interview Methodology; Self-Report

As noted previously, the question of the nature of problems in which the informant was most interested was the first question in a series of questions specifically aimed at the entire learning issue. The strategy -- to begin with a question that didn't make the informant directly confront her learning from soap operas -- seems to have been quite profitable. To begin with, as mentioned earlier, only four informants stated that they had no preference in this regard. More importantly, with no prompting from the interviewer, informants, when answering this question, often went immediately into reciting the reason for their preferences. More often than not, informants would cite similarities between their own lives and the topics that they wished to see treated (e.g., see the excerpt under "marriage and family"). The specifics of these relationships will be discussed shortly.

Returning then to the methodological question at hand, one must seriously consider the fact that there seems to be an inverse relationship between the transparency of social-learning questions and informants' willingness to relate themselves to such learning activity. Therefore, although the simplicity of relying on self-report is certainly enticing from the researcher's point of view, it may simply be an unrealistic method of securing meaningful data regarding television and social learning.

I would argue that one is less likely to obtain falsification from respondents when one is engaged in an extended interview session -- such as the sessions which served to accumulate data for this report. Certainly, it would seem that the least suitable method based upon self-report would be varieties of the multiple-choice and/or semantic differential surveys. The short answers of such surveys seemingly cannot compete with prolonged conversation which tends to deny the informant such "erasable deliberateness", so to speak. Nonetheless, even with "in-depth" interview, it would seem wise to formulate questions that have the ability to indirectly test the learning phenomenon.

Attitudes Toward Contemporary Issues

Of the 36 informants who did indicate specific issues that they like to see portrayed, almost half made note of the "contemporary issues". Although only 11 informants mentioned only contemporary issue themes, others would tack on (sometimes as if it were obligatory to do so) the drug abuse, child abuse, and/or similar issues. Although through interviews it is virtually impossible to ascertain the informants' honest commitment to such events, an interesting difference between the college and non-college groups did result with respect to their attitudes toward these issues.

When expressing a preference for portrayals of contemporary

issues, the non-college informants (regardless of whether they stated a preference for only this subject or for this among other subjects) uniformly indicated the public service-type information as opposed to the 'ideologically motivated' stories. In other words, their preference was for 'pieces' on the various current concerns. These less-educated informants very clearly seemed to recognize these 'pieces' as being "educational" and they expressed appreciation for them as such:

...The same thing with her mother when she had her breast removed. It showed us what to do if we would find something like that -- where to go and what to do, things like that. (Younger, Non-college)

Therefore, only members of the college group expressed an interest in ideologically-motivated stories. In this respect, many of these informants were more inclined to suggest future possibilities in soap operas than to state appreciation for the types of issues thus far presented in serials:

I think I would like to see more women on television having jobs -- showing single women or women alone who are still OK as people, and also, where a relationship can work and still be a human being. There are problems, but usually on these things women are persuaded that it is just too difficult, so they quit the job and stay at home again. So, women's stuff would be the primary thing. (Older, College)

While none of the non-college informants mentioned the portrayal of racism and sexism problems (these two being the issues

most frequently addressed by the college educated) there were also college informants who expressed something of an appreciation for the other kind of contemporary issue -- the public service type. However, here the appreciation of these topics was somewhat different from that expressed by the non-college informants. More specifically, while the non-college informant saw these public service-type pieces as personally informative and worthwhile, the college-educated informants tended to treat them as public services and appreciated them mainly on that level:

Well, I'm sort of torn. I mean I approve of al -- well a lot of the social propoganda they produce -- like on child abuse on All My Children. I mean their treatment of these topics are always so obvious and simplistic, but then again, and this is sort of elitist, so are some of the viewers probably. I liked the anti-war politics in All My Children too. I mean, I think it may be a good way of reaching people who don't have any mind for considering political issues. (Young, College)

Another pertinent issue here is that informants in general, particularly the non-college viewers, seemed to divorce the reliability of the 'public service' information from other more tacit types of 'information' that is transmitted on soap operas. More specifically, on several occasions an informant would cite clear-cut instances of learning from these 'public service' pieces, yet when later in the interview when the informant was asked whether or not she "took advice" from soap operas, she might answer "absolutely not".

Clearly, for certain viewers there is a separation between what is perceived as personal, character-to-character advice, and impersonal (superimposed) issue-to-viewer information. It is also rather clear that there is a certain trust in this latter type of information. Ostensibly, this approach seems justified; who would lie about breast cancer or child abuse? Of course, the answer is that daytime serials -- regardless of the fact that they may be required to have a technical advisor when addressing certain issues -- have the potential to state the facts while misrepresenting outcomes. An extremely overweight woman in one serial had the ability to shed her excess poundage (not without some difficulty) once her positive self-esteem was established. In another serial, a young alcoholic, after much time spent in a half-way house, manages to rather quickly relinquish her habit after finding a home with a family that offers a little love. The husbands of breast cancer victims inevitably and without any doubts still sexually yearn for their mates. The perspective is almost always positive and while it has definite implications in terms of that which is being learned, it also has meaning in terms of the informant's social adjustment -- the topic discussed in the following section.

Story Preference and Social Learning

If one attempts to make connections based on logic, the data

with regard to story preferences certainly seem to point to the use of the soap operas for identification, if not learning or potential learning experiences.

While the selection of informants was not 'controlled' for anything but race, age and education, other data were collected, e.g., on marital status, parental status, etc.,. The relationship with regard to some of these data is quite interesting.

Of the ten younger college informants, all were unmarried and were living either alone or with another woman at the time of the interview. Only one of these informants had ever been married and none had children. In stating the kind of soap opera material they preferred, four of these informants noted events that could be categorized as "contemporary issue" subjects. Of the remaining six, one expressed a preference for "marriage and family" situations, while the other five cited male/female relationships and/or sex topics. It might also be noted that of the four viewers who expressed an interest in "contemporary issues", one informant was specifically interested in the portrayal of feminist women.

Of the ten younger non-college women, seven were married (four of whom were parents) one was a divorced parent, and two were unmarried and living with their families. In this group, three informants cited contemporary issues. The two unmarried women expressed an interest in portrayals of male/female relations, and the remaining five women were divided between the marriage and

family category and having no preference.

Considering the older college-educated women, three had never been married and were living alone, two were divorced (one a parent, and the other five were married (four of whom had children). Their preferences can be stated as follows: Three informants (two divorced and one married) cited contemporary issue subjects. Of these three, the two divorced women both expressed a preference for feminist-oriented topics. The three single women mentioned sex and/or male/female relationships as points of interest, while the married women cited marriage and family portrayals.

Of the older non-college women, six were married parents, two were widowed parents, one was a separated parent and one was never married. Of these women, two expressed an interest in contemporary issues (one widowed and one married), two cited male/female relationships (one separated and one married), four married women noted portrayals of marriage and family and the remaining two stated no specific preference.

Clearly, any inference based on the above data is speculative, but there seems to be indications that the informants preferred to see situations or problems that are either informative (from the contemporary issue perspective) or, to a larger extent, that represent events that have at least some similarity to their own status as women in society. It is not particularly surprising, for

example, that the only mention of feminist and/or working women was made by non-homemakers in the college-educated groups. Similarly, the fact that of the 14 never-married women interviewed, regardless of their educational levels, ten expressed interest in male/female and/or sex relationships. Certainly, the preferences stated by informants in this study point to story-lines that are seemingly pertinent to the informant's respective social condition.

7. Soap Operas and Social Adjustment

As noted earlier, the emphasis in this section is placed upon examining the extent to which the informants use the soap operas to substantiate that which they think is important and correct. Clearly there is a dialectic involved here, i.e., the viewer's sense of importance and value of issues might have been, at least partially, developed by the daytime serials, themselves. Therefore, what is to be investigated here is, in its broadest definition, an exploration of the informants' values as they relate to the perception, interpretation and evaluation of soap opera material.

To be specific, two issues (each with sub-categories) are examined. The first of these is the case of "demographic reinforcement". In other words, is there any relationship between the informant's own social constellation (in terms of age, socioeconomic level and marital status) and the demographic constellation of the characters she likes and dislikes? Second, this section will examine the degree to which the informant's moral/ethical values influence her assessment of the soap opera stories and characters.

Demographic Reinforcement

Each informant was asked to name her favorite character or characters and her most disliked character or characters in one of the two specific serials. All characters in both serials were coded in terms of age, sex, marital status and socioeconomic level. Each respondent was similarly coded. Following this, for each character mentioned in both the liked and disliked categories (usually one to three per category were noted) it was determined with regard to each variable (e.g., age, sex, etc.) whether or not the character matched the given variable as it applied to the informant.³⁶ If, with regard to any given variable a majority of the characters mentioned conformed to the informant's own condition, it was labeled a case of "liking like" or "disliking like", whatever the case was. A majority constituted more than half the characters mentioned. For example, if a young informant cited three characters when discussing her favorites, it would be required that two of those three also be young in order that a positive age factor be coded. If only one of the three were young, it might only be considered a negative age factor if, when citing disliked characters, the majority of noted characters were also young. Similarly, a

³⁶ In order to determine the informants' SES level, the occupation of each informant's 'supporter' (either herself and/or parents and/or husband) was considered in conjunction with her educational level.

"disliking unlike" phenomenon would not be labeled as such unless: 1) the majority of the disliked characters were unlike the informant in terms of the given variable, and 2) the given variable was not manifested in the majority of the informant's favorite characters. Any other constellation was coded as being inconclusive, although, in the following discussion, I will sometimes refer to certain of these weaker patterns.

Age -- Among the younger informants, 12 of the 20 preferred younger characters, while the majority of their disliked characters were older. There was no difference between the educational levels among the young. Considering the older informants, there was no age effect among those in the college-educated group. The data compiled for the older, non-college informants as a whole, although inconclusive in terms of the coding criteria, demonstrate that while these ten informants tend to number older characters as their favorites, the disliked characters here show no clear pattern in terms of age.

Sex -- There was no clear sex effect in any of the informant categories. This is the case because male characters did not predominate any individual's disliked list. However, it might be noted that only one of the non-college informants (older) displayed a preference for female characters,

five of the college-educated informants did express a preference for female characters in their naming of favorites.

Marital Status -- Again, there were no clear-cut effects here because in terms of the characters' marital statuses, there was no pattern in terms of those who were disliked. On the other hand, it was very clear that among the non-married informants (particularly those who were younger and never married) there was a predominance of unmarried characters listed among their favorites. Similarly, married informants (particularly those in the older groups) seemed to prefer those characters who were married.

Socioeconomic Status -- In considering the two serials on which the interview concentrated in part, there was, at the time, a fairly equal mixture of male and female, married and unmarried and younger and older characters. On the other hand, in both serials, there were fewer characters who were portrayed as even hailing from anything but middle, upper-middle or clearly upper-class families. Therefore, it may seem less valid to subject the informants' preferences to SES analysis as opposed to analyses of the other variables previously discussed. However, given this situation, it is interesting to note that of the 13 informants who were from lower-middle or working-class backgrounds, the preferences

of nine indicate an SES effect. In other words, nine of these women particularly liked the 'poorer' characters while at the same time listing the 'wealthier' characters among those they disliked. These nine-women were non-college informants, whereas three of the remaining four working-class women (for whom there was no SES effect) were college educated. Of the remaining 27 middle-class informants, the characters most frequently preferred were also in middle or upper-middle class roles. However, the preferences of these informants did not indicate that they disliked non-middle-class characters.

Review of Demographic Reinforcement Issue

Clearly, in this study there were no overwhelming indications pointing to the fact that viewers both only like characters who are demographically like themselves and only dislike characters who differ from their own set of social variables, so to speak. Certainly, the absence of exact "demographic correlation" should probably not be unexpected given that there are other, possibly more important, factors which enter into viewers' evaluations of characters. Indeed, the remainder of this section will be aimed at exploring some of these other factors and, as will be demonstrated, it is not surprising that this study has uncovered other effects accounting for

likes and dislikes which are more pervasive than "demographics".

Nevertheless, the analyses of age, sex, marital and socioeconomic factors do not seem to be completely uninformative. One must question, for example, why (as indicated) informants liked characters who were similar to themselves in terms of age and marital statuses. Of course, one could claim that an individual is always more comfortable in the company of peers, but is this, in itself, an explanation or a description? In other words, is the 'comfort' a mechanical result of conditioning to "like like", so to speak, or is it a function of the fact that being with and/or observing others who have similar social constraints permits us to both see our own lives as being 'normal' (i.e., there are others) and to gain insight into our own situations by having a sample of other "like" situations?

The issue of socioeconomic status is probably more complex. As noted, the majority of the working-class informants preferred the 'poorer' characters and tended to dislike the 'wealthier' characters, although the middle-class respondents, while preferring middle-class characters were not unfavorable toward the working-class characters.

Most significant here is the fact that three college-educated, working-class informants (the other working-class respondents were non-college) had no clear-cut preferences or dislikes in this regard. Given this, it might be argued that a viewer's social mobility is related to her evaluation of characters in terms of their social class. More specifically, perhaps it is the case that socially mobile viewers are more comfortable with similarly mobile characters and/or already upper-class characters because both types are presently and/or potentially relevant to their lifestyles. However, one reason that these same viewers may not be unfavorable toward working-class characters is because they are non-threatening, and more importantly, because these characters, in a sense, substantiate the viewer's superiority (i.e., there are people less fortunate than they). On the other hand, working-class viewers who might perceive their social mobility as being somewhat limited (e.g., the non-college as opposed to the college-educated working-class) may prefer seeing characters with similar limitations 'cope', and therefore, these respondents may be unfavorable toward those characters (the wealthy) whose situation is not only identifiable, but relatively unattainable.

Value Reinforcement

Essentially, the bulk of the data used in analyzing the value reinforcement issue was derived from the informants' discussion of their reasons for liking and disliking specific characters and sub-plots, their specific attitudes toward villain characters, the changes they would make in the given soap opera, and the kinds of things they predicted would happen in a given serial. Clearly, the data resulting from discussions of the above and related issues yeild insights not only on moral and/or ethical values, but on values in a more general sense, i.e., those things that make soap operas worthwhile to them. Therefore, for purposes of clarification, the term 'value', per se, will only be used in terms of moral and/or ethical considerations.

Preferences and Dislikes -- Essentially, there are five different classes of criteria that informants gave for either liking or disliking the given characters and/or sub-plots: 1) demographics, 2) drama, 3) physical appearance, 4) values, and 5) ideology.

- 1) Demographics -- Here, informants explicitly noted that their preferences were based on "demographic similarity" in one or another respect. The most common relationship was between younger informants and the sub-plots they

preferred, i.e., they explicitly noted that they preferred a given sub-plot because of its involvement with younger characters. No informant used demographic criteria with regard to her preference for an individual character.

- 2) Drama -- In this case, informants would point to some aspect of the dramatic quality of the story as a criterion for preference. However, to be precise, the issue of 'drama' is really sub-divided:
 - a) Acting -- Here, informants would base their judgments on the quality of acting.
 - b) Dramatic Structure -- In this case, informants placed an emphasis on the dramatic quality of the portrayed events. Most frequent in this regard were complaints concerning a sub-plot being "dragged out". However, there were also comments concerning scripts, realism, etc.
- 3) Physical Appearance -- Occasionally, an informant would indicate that her preference for a character was based upon the given individual's looks:

I can't stand Phillip. He looks like a goon. (Younger, College)

4) Values -- Although this category is again sub-divided, it should be noted that in both cases, the informant is relying on her perception of the morals or ethics portrayed.

a) Personal Qualities -- Here, informants would evaluate a character on the basis of his/her behavior or 'personality'. Essentially, informants would either like a character because he/she represented 'positive' social qualities, or they would dislike a character because of 'negative' attributes. While the case of "villains" will be discussed separately, it should be mentioned that informants' evaluations were not necessarily linked to the good or bad stereotypes portrayed. For instance, in the first of the following examples, the informant is discussing a "villain" character, whereas in the second excerpt, another informant evaluates typically "good" characters:

I like Laurie. I know a lot of people don't care for her, but you know, she's the only honest one there. She tells people off, and you know, she doesn't act phoney. (Younger, Non-college)

I can't stand either Chris or Leslie because they're too goody-goody sometimes. Sometimes, they're just too holier-than-thou. I can't stand those types. (Younger, College)

b) Rectitude -- In this case, informants were usually commenting upon a sub-plot. More specifically, rectitude refers to a story being like because "things were as they should be" or conversely, it relates to a story being disliked because the events portrayed did not meet the viewer's standards of moral/ethical righteousness. However, as in the first example, the informant would sometimes evaluate a character in this manner:

She (Laurie) can be a nice girl and she can go way out. She plays up very nicely to the men. But sometimes I get mad at her when she's mean to her sister. Now, there's a book that she wrote. The book's coming out. Now, if anything's about her (the sister) I won't like her (Laurie). I won't like her if she's mean to her. Her sister was so sick once upon a time. (Older, Non-college)

Q: Are there any parts in The Young and The Restless that you don't like?

A: With Jill's mother who might be getting married -- it's a drag. I've waited so long. She should have married the other man she was in love with. She was in love with this guy before her husband came back, and then she just pushed him aside and went with her husband. And you know, people do have feelings. I don't think she was right to the other man. She should not have done that. That's my opinion. (Younger, Non-college)

5) Ideology -- It could be argued that what is being classified as an ideological rationale (for liking or disliking) is not altogether unrelated to the value-oriented criterion. However, in this case, unlike the value response, the informant likes or dislikes a character or sub-plot not because of the actions of the given characters, but because of the perceived overtones given to those actions. For example, in the last excerpt cited, the informant said that she disliked a sub-plot because the woman wasn't considering another person's "feelings" -- the character, according to the informant, was making a poor choice. If another informant were to also dislike that same sub-plot on an ideological basis, she would be opposed not to the character's "choice", but to the seeming moral context in which that choice was made -- the soap opera's "message" behind that choice. Perhaps the following excerpt of an ideological rationale will help to clarify this distinction:

Well, you know, there's not too much I really dislike at the moment, but wait -- there is something that I really couldn't tolerate a little while ago. You know that thing with Gregg and Gwen -- you know, where he finds out she was a whore. You know, I can un-

derstand a man feeling like that, possibly even rushing her off to a convent the way he did. But you know, the whole time Gregg isn't presented as if he has any problems for wanting to do this -- as if he wasn't sick himself. That's wrong and that's why I hated it. He was good and she deserved to repent -- just like that. Everybody understood poor, abused Gregg. (Older, College)

For purposes of analysis, it is somewhat ambiguous as to whether or not this type of response really qualifies as a "value" orientation. Certainly, the informant is displeased, but this displeasure is not a function of disliking unethical or immoral outcomes per se. As will be seen in the following discussion, the same type of distinction emerges when one considers the changes informants want to make in their serials.

Changes -- Informants were asked what, if anything, they would change in the specific serial we happened to be discussing. In analyzing their responses, some of the same categories from the previous discussion begin to reappear:

- 1) Drama -- Here, informants invariably suggested either quickening the pace of the serial or the elimination of various kinds of story "padding".
- 2) Value/Rectitude -- In this case, informants suggested changes so that their concept of moral rectitude could

established:

Note: Parenthetical descriptions of characters are my own.

I wouldn't have let Mary (a good character) die on All My Children. On The Young and the Restless, I wouldn't have had Philip Chancellor (good) die, but I would have Mrs. Chancellor (bad) die. I wouldn't have Erica (bad) with anyone on All My Children and Phoebe Tyler (bad), I would have her in a car accident to shut her mouth. (Younger, Non-college)

I would change him to go back to his wife -- Linc and Chuck. (Older, Non-college)

Well, I would have Kitty get back with Linc because they're really a great pair and they love each other devotedly. And I'd like to see Ann and Paul get married --especially for the sake of the child and they are deeply in love. And I'd like to see Erica (bad) get lost. (Older, Non-college)

I'd like to bring Mr. Chancellor (dead) back for Jill (good). Let's see -- I'd like Chris and Snapper to get along better. I'd like Les and Brad to get together. And JoAnne (good), she should be alright. (Younger, Non-college)

I would have Liz marry the other man -- Sam Powers -- because he loves her and her other husband, he left her and he's just coming back and she's just feeling sorry for him now. He didn't worry about her with those three kids. She has a chance for a whole new life. I think she should marry him and forget about the other one. (Younger, Non-college)

- 3) Ideology -- Here, the informant's emphasis was to change the context in which events take place. Again, the distinction between ideological and value orientations is the same as in the previous discussion.

I don't know. I'd certainly change the way the women think. I mean everytime they consider getting married, they always have to figure if it's time for them to give it all up -- their work or their interests -- or if their pasts are going to get in the way. They should show them thinking about more relevant things like "do I want to spend my life with this person?" and stop being so self-sacrificing. (Older, College)

Well, like I was saying before, I would integrate Frank Grant (a Black character) more into the story. (Younger, College)

Criteria for Evaluation

If we consider the criteria on which informants base their preferences, dislikes and recommended changes, a very clear distinction emerges between the college and non-college educated viewers. More specifically, the value-oriented response was far less frequently given by the college-educated informants as compared to those who had not attended college. Whereas over 60% of the college-educated informants gave non-value-oriented criteria (drama - 31%, drama and ideology - 28%, ideology - 10%, value - 11%, other - 20%) of the non-college respondents, over 60% did cite value criteria (value - 64%, drama - 22%, ideolo-

gy - 0%, other - 18%). Now, if the value versus ideology situation may seem problematic, it might be enlightening to examine the way in which informants responded to questions concerning villain characters and story-line predictions. After a look at these data, I will return to this value-orientation issue.

Villain Characters -- Although there supposedly is an attempt among soap operas to have rounded, multi-dimensional characters, there seems to always be those characters who rather consistently turn out to be devious and troublesome. If informants had not fully discussed these characters on their own, they were specifically asked to comment upon them. Essentially, as with other characters, it appears that the villain can be liked or disliked on either the basis of the character's behavior, or on the basis of the dramatic excitement the character provokes:

A value-orientation:

I like Laurie and Mrs. Chancellor. You know sometimes they're not too nice, but they both have had very bad lives. Laurie wasn't even her father's child. And Mrs. Chancellor, well, she always got loved for her money and not for herself. (Older, Non-college)

A drama-orientation:

Erica? She's my favorite. It's really the only time the story goes and gets spicy. Claudette's the same way, although she's irritating because she really can't act very well -- you know, the actress. But still, when she's involved you try to overlook it because it gets exciting. (Younger, College)

Unlike the examples given, and as might be expected, most of the value-oriented assessments of villains were statements of dislike. As in the previous cases, more college-educated viewers (14) than non-college-educated respondents (2) discussed the villains in purely dramatic terms. One other issue here must be considered; in addition to general assessments, informants discussed the extent to which they liked to see the villain characters in action. Nineteen of the 20 college-educated informants said that they did like to see these characters (and these 19 informants included those who on a 'value-level' said they disliked the character(s).)

I mean like Phoebe Tyler; I really don't like her because she's always making life difficult for everyone. I dislike them as people, but I don't dislike watching them. ...I like Kate, but I don't like watching her because she's boring. Phoebe, I dislike, but I like watching her because there's action in the story. You know when Phoebe's on the screen there's not gonna be wasted time -- that something's gonna happen. And that's the way I feel about Claudette too, although Claudette grates on my nerves. She's just so obviously insincere and manipulative. On the other hand, it makes the story move, so I do enjoy it. (Younger, College)

On the other hand, ten of the 20 non-college informants indicated that they either disliked the villains and the segments in which they were involved or that they didn't mind seeing the villains as long as they weren't being villainous,

i.e., succeeding in their immorality:

Q: So you like Erica?

A: No. She's always scheming and out for herself. And I don't like Margo's daughter. She's even worse than Erica.

Q: Do you like to watch her?

A: No! She gets me upset with her. With her, I'd like to (indicates stabbing motion)

Q: What about Phoebe Tyler?

A: Obnoxious.

Q: Do you like to watch her?

A: No. She gets on my nerves. Snobbish and nobody's (sic) too good for her children. You know, I don't like to watch snobs. (Younger, Non-college)

Similarly, in recommending changes, most of the non-college informants who didn't like seeing the villains indicated that they would somehow remove the villains' influence so that "peace" could prevail -- even if this meant a weakening of acknowledged dramatic intrigue.

Predictions -- Informants were asked to make predictions with regard to the characters they had been discussing and, although these predictions will be important in analyzing reality/fiction orientations, they may also serve to elucidate the present value-orientations discussion. More specifically, for this purpose, informants' predictions were coded in terms of whether

they matched the informants' recommended changes. None of the college-educated informants foresaw their recommendations coming to fruition in the stories. On the other hand, nine of the non-college informants did make predictions which bore out their earlier recommendations. For example, let's look at a previously cited excerpt in its fuller context:

Q: If you could change anything on All My Children, what would you have changed?

A: Well, I would have Kitty get back with Linc because they're really a great pair and they love each other devotedly. And, I'd like to see Anne and Paul get married especially for the sake of the child and they are deeply in love. And, I'd like to see Erica get lost.

Q: Well, you said that one of your favorite sub-plots was Anne and Paul. How do you think that's gonna continue and end?

A: I think it's gonna wind up allright. I think they're gonna eventually get married and live happily ever after.

Q: Are they going to have the baby?

A: I think so. Yeah. She's carrying his baby. She's a nice person basically, but she's made many mistakes too.

Q: What other predictions do you have for All My Children?

A: I think Lincoln will get back with Kitty. I'd hate to think that he wouldn't. Other characters will come in to take over. (Older, Non-college)

One of the last comments made by the above informant --
"I'd hate to think that he wouldn't -- is very indicative of
the comments made by value-oriented informants whose recom-
mended changes and whose predictions were similar:

A: I'd have Claudette take an overdose
because I can't stand her. I'm not
kidding you. That's what she's into.
She's got an expensive habit on co-
caine so something's gonna happen to
her. I wish something would happen to
her. And I'd like to see Anne and Paul
go back together and Tara and Chuck
get close again.

Q: What do you think will happen?

A: I don't think Chuck (Tara's sick hus-
band) is going to die because Tara is
going to stay put.

Q: Why do you think that?

A: I don't know, I just think she's
morally that type of person. I mean
I don't think she's gonna go back to
Phil and leave her husband. So, there-
fore, I think he's going to live. Phil
will probably make it with Erica (his
wife) in the long run.

Q: Is there anything in the story that
makes you predict this?

A: Not particularly, but isn't that the
way it should be? Tara is gonna finally
decide that that is where her place is
-- with Chuck and the child. (Younger,
Non-college)

It might also be mentioned that in making predictions, the college-educated informants by and large, saw many problems and setbacks befalling the various characters moreso than did those in the non-college group. More specifically, the predictions made by the non-college group were often tantamount to happy-ever-after endings.

Value Reinforcement; A Summary

As indicated by their criteria for liking and disliking characters, their recommended changes, and their attitudes toward villains, it seems quite clear that the non-college informants, much more than the more highly educated viewers, want to see moral rectitude established so that "peace" can prevail among the 'deserving' characters. The nature of their predictions also confirm their understanding of the "everything will turn out alright" sentiment. This is not to imply that the personal logic of the more educated viewers may not include this sentiment. However, the college viewers were clearly less intent on seeing this sort of closure materialize in their serials.

A very particular sense of this distinction can be seen if, for example, one specifically looks at the married viewers of All My Children. Interestingly, almost all of the non-college informants in this group disliked, would have changed, made predictions for changes, etc., with regard to a particular sub-plot

involving an unhappily married man getting involved with a former sweetheart and thereby destroying her happy (although passionless) marriage to another 'good' young man (Phil, Tara and Chuck). In general, they were disturbed by the seeming disregard for the institution of marriage, and they wanted things to work out so that everything would be 'moral' and peaceful within the frameworks of the respective marriages. The married college-educated informants (as well as the non-married college viewers) on the other hand, were much more indifferent to this fictional situation. Among these college informants, the biggest complaint with regard to this sub-plot was the tediousness of the protracted story-line.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

REALITY/FICTION ORIENTATIONS

Essentially, all coding of responses as reflecting either a reality or fiction orientation was predicated on the attribution/inference model of interpretive strategies developed by Worth and Gross. Briefly put, Worth and Gross have found that when fiction qua fiction is dealt with, the viewer will perceive intentional, authored control "behind" the events in question, and that this perception will influence subsequent reactions to the content. In other words, the viewer will infer meaning predominantly in terms of what she perceives as having been implied by the author. The attributional response, on the other hand, is one that demonstrates that the viewer is treating the events as "natural" or unauthored (i.e., in the sense of not being intended as "messages"). Therefore, in this latter case, the viewer will attribute meaning predominantly in terms of what she knows about real-life. For example, let's consider the predictions of two informants, in which from a purely "content" standpoint, both women say the same thing, i.e., that two characters (Chuck and Tara) will remain married to each other:

I think Chuck and Tara will stay together for the sake of the baby. Even if it is Phil's child, Chuck has really acted as the father. I don't go for that. I mean irregardless of who actually made the baby,

it's the parents who raise the child that counts. (Younger, Non-College)

Chuck and Tara will stay together because this way there's always room for complication later on. If Tara and Phil actually did stay together, the whole story there would be kaput. (Younger, College)

It is clear that in the first case, the viewer only takes real-life stereotypes into consideration when formulating her prediction (Attribution). In the second case, the respondent bases her judgment on her explicit familiarity with soap opera story-telling conventions.

For the purposes of this analysis, it was decided that somewhat more specific distinctions than simply attribution vs. inference could be drawn in coding the informants' responses. Essentially, two new dichotomies (both variations of the Attribution/Inference Model) were erected:

1. Emphatic vs. Critical Responses
2. Structural vs. Narrative Approaches

The emphatic vs. critical dichotomy involves the extent to which viewers perceive and treat soap opera material as an extension of their own experiences. The emphatic (attributional) viewer is one for whom there is a strong imaginative or emotional projection of her own sentiments and tendencies into the fictional ongoing. This sensitivity to the material is far more characteristic of an orientation to real-life phenomena than is the critical (inferential) response. The critical viewer is one who

treats and evaluates daytime serial events according to principles or rules designed for judging the fictional production as such.³⁷

For example, in the following excerpts, each informant discusses a romantically linked couple from All My Children:

And Ann, I think should get back with Paul because I don't like Nick at all. I don't think he is any good. (Younger, Non-College)

Now, the whole problem with Anne and Nick is ridiculous. They could be one of the more realistic couples on soap operas -- especially Nick, but it was all so ridiculous contrived. If they wanted to have them break up OK, but not over such a ridiculous misunderstanding. They built Nick up to be much more realistic than that. (Older, College)

In the first case, the informant's response is personalized -- she is involved. She makes sense of the situation by using her own real-life standards of judging people. In the second example, the informant does not place herself in the action; her observations critically deal with the soap opera plot.

The distinction between a narrative and structural approach is based on whether a viewer is more attentive to the story or plot, or to the form of handling of the story. What is implied here is that an emphasis on soap opera structure indicates an

³⁷ This distinction is very similar to Goffman's distinction between "onlookers" and "theatre-goers." He describes onlookers as those who behave as if they are present, although inactive, parties to some interaction that is happening on the stage. His theatre-goers, on the other hand, see the stage as a sharp dividing line -- they are simply viewing a production rather than vicariously participating in some interaction. (Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis, (1974) Chapter 4).

awareness of fiction in a way that narrative orientation does not. For example, in the following excerpts one viewer relates the kinds of things she talks about when discussing a soap opera with her friends:

(We talk about) whatever happens that day. Like how Margo is really stupid for not telling Paul about her face lift. We know that he's gonna find it out sometime because Claudette is mean enough to blab it around. (Younger, Non-College)

In the next structurally-approached response, the informant again discusses her conversations about soap operas. The difference here is that the respondent discusses the fictional treatment of the characters and so forth, rather than the characters, per se:

We sort of catch up on what's been going on in various soaps and what we think of them...when it would be over we'd have a very short discussion of how ridiculous it was or something like that... Oh we used to laugh about how they dressed Phoebe Tyler like she was always costumed in some formal gown, and how Mona Cain's office clock always said the same time. (Younger, College)

Twelve different issues, each discussed in every interview, were selected as having the most potential to signal an informant's attributional and/or inferential style. Using either an emphatic/critical or a narrative/structural code, each interview was ana-

lyzed for all 12 events.³⁸ The 12 issues were as follows:

1. Talking about soap operas with others -- If a viewer was noted as using a narrative approach here, it meant that she reported discussing the serial events, per se -- much like gossip:

Mostly we talk about the lies they are telling and when a woman is being fickle, how she doesn't have a sound mind, and what we think they should do, and what we would do in the same situation.
(Younger, Non-College)

A structural response, on the other hand, was one in which the viewer reported discussing the handling of the story and characters, e.g., acting, script, etc.:

My sister and I talk about the unbelievable way they portray women and men -- like pregnancies, for instance. We were just saying that we don't know why they make every male character drop absolutely everything he's doing the minute he learns he's gonna be a father. It's like they don't care what men really do at all. (Older, College)

2. Laughing and Crying -- There, a viewer's response was said to be emphatic if she cried or laughed at events in the soap opera that were intentionally funny or sad within the context of the story. In other words, she would be responding to these

³⁸ In certain cases an informant could give a response which was ambiguous or which simply didn't fit either of the two possibilities. For example, with regard to the issue "talking about soap operas with others," a respondent who said she only spoke with others for purposes of catching up on missed stories could not be said to fit either of the narrative or structural options available. In this and similar cases a third option ("other") was provided.

events as if they were real:

I cried a lot when Tony Vincent died on Search For Tomorrow. It was so sad. She loved him so much. It was really sad to watch her suffer so much. When Mary died on All My Children, it was the same thing. Jeff suffered so much because he lost her and the baby. I mean it actually drove him insane. That was very sad to watch. (Older, Non-College)

The critical informant, on the other hand, would not normally cry over soap opera events. This is probably because sympathy crying would seem to only be an emphatic response. However, "critics" might laugh, but here it is not done in empathy:

I don't know. I'm sometimes laughing more at the characters than with them. There are some of them that I get a real kick out of watching -- like Charles because he makes mistakes. He screws his lines. I get a kick out of wondering what he's gonna say next, or what words he's gonna stumble over. (Younger, College)

Given the above comparison of excerpts, it should be noted that the empathic vs. the critical response is not differentiated by crying vs. laughter reactions. Although, it may be true that crying is not generally a critical response, it is not likewise true that laughter cannot be considered empathic. Critical laughter, as reported in the above excerpt, is that which is in reaction to "treatment," i.e., it demonstrates a cognizance of the fictional form. However, there is a laughter which is in direct response to the events per se (empathic) rather than in response to the manner in which the events are carried out or treated. For example:

Did you ever see One Life To Live, because on there there's these two characters, Wanda and Vinnie. Wanda, in particular, is really funny. She's not real smart or anything -- sort of lower class, but sometimes she's really adorable when she starts worrying about somebody or something. When her and Vinnie get together they make me laugh. (Older, College)

Also, empathic laughter isn't necessarily in reaction to an intentionally humorous situation (although it is difficult to determine that of which humor exactly consists). More specifically, there are other types of episodes, most notably a villain character getting "caught" or receiving "comeuppance," which can trigger laughter, and this too must be considered empathic, i.e., it is still in response to portrayed events in and of themselves:

Q: Have you ever laughed?

A: Yes. Maybe one of the characters got paid back for something they had done to another character. Like I was happy that they finally found out what Laurie was doing to Leslie. It was fun to see her get caught. (Younger, Non-College)

Sometimes, in fact, the empathic laughter is not in "triumph" or in reaction to "comedy," but in response to something that might be called "recognition":

...You have to laugh. I just think it's funny the way she keeps talking about her weight all the time -- JoAnne. It's not really funny, but after a while you start laughing because it's really true and I heard Peggy say to her "you look like the side of a house" or something. It was really funny because it's true. All

she does is talk about her weight.
(Younger, Non-College)

3. Acting Differently -- In each interview, the informant was asked to discuss any situations in soap operas in which she would act differently from the way it was portrayed. Although most informants reported that there were many situations of this type, there were clearly two types of reports. The empathic response was marked by the informant's direct involvement in the given situation. In discussing how she would have acted differently, she placed herself into the immediate action:

...If I were Tara, I would never have gone back to Phil. I take marriage vows as very sacred and I would never -- even though that was his child. That's the way I feel. She made a commitment to Chuck and therefore, I think she shouldn't have went and had that one night with Phil.
(Younger, Non-College)

Instead of having "competing views" with the characters, the critical informant, on the other hand, discusses differences in terms of the distinction between fictionally scripted and real-life behavior; she is objective about the distinctions:

...a lot of time on soaps they play games with each other. This one loves that one but she's afraid to say, and the guy finds out through her friend, and I think why don't they come out and say it already, but I also know, of course, it's a show and they have to continue to keep it going. So I know they can't do what I feel because the problem would be over in one day, so they wouldn't have it stretched out for three weeks.
(Younger, Non-College)

4. Describing Content -- Informants were asked to briefly give a synopsis of specific serials. One method of reporting the content was from a narrative perspective; the viewer described specific events:

There's these two girls who are having affairs with married men. There's this one girl who just lost her husband because she's quite heavy. She lost him to a younger girl. There's one whose husband is going totally blind and knows nothing about it...and Chris is defending this man who's on rape and she thinks of her own situation. (Younger, Non-College)

The structural description presented a "view from above" instead of the narrative approach's "inside" information. In other words, with a structural description, the story form is emphasized:

It's all about these men and women in a small town who are inevitably connected with each other. You know, it's really a series of little morality plays about love, marriage, family, friendship, and you know. Only the same characters are involved over and over again. (Older, College)

5. Changing Content -- As discussed in a different context earlier, informants were asked about the things they would see changed in the given soap opera if they were so empowered. Here, of course, we are not concerned with the specifics of the proposed alterations (as we were in the previous section) but in the position the informant chose in order to effect a change. More specifically, with a narrative approach, the informant would suggest changes often as if they were bits of advice to the

characters. In other words, the response showed no indication of the notion of script, writer, etc:

I would like to see Philip live with Erica, the one he's married to and not go back with Tara. I think Tara should stay with her former husband and leave well enough alone. (Older, Non-college)

The structural changes, on the other hand, were made by informants taking recourse to the author or script:

Well, like in any soap opera, I would hasten the plot -- like in Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman. Do you watch that? Specifically, well I would see to it that people like Greg were given an evil tone rather than an idealistic one. I would also give the cast some acting lessons. Oh, and most important, I would thoroughly eliminate all that bloody singin that the actors obviously have written into their contracts. I mean it's like they are doing opera. I mean they burst into song in inappropriate places. I mean in the story, the singer may not be an entertainer, but just wanting to express his or her love for someone. I don't want to see The Sound of Music everyday. (Younger, College)

6. Liking and Disliking Characters -- Here, the empathic orientation is one in which the viewer likes or dislikes characters on the basis of their personalities within the drama:

Q: Are there any characters you don't particularly like?

A: Uh, Mr. Foster -- that man that came back -- I hate him.

Q: Why?

A: He's a jerk. I hate the way that he mealy-mouths around. He goes up to Mrs. Foster and says "Well, can I kiss you?" Well then, why did he do it? I just don't like him at all. Mrs. Chancellor of course I don't like because she's a mean old lady. (Younger, College)

With a critical orientation, the rules for evaluating soap opera characters are clearly not the same rules that the viewer applies in liking or disliking real individuals. Here, evaluations are based upon the character's contribution to the drama (e.g., exciting or dull roles) and/or the actor's contribution (good or bad acting styles) and/or because of the social or political implications of the fictional representation:

I like Mona Cain. She's a good actress. Her part is a bit insipid, but she plays it well. I enjoy her. Phoebe is good also. She's a good villainess. When she's busy with her intrigues, I'll stop and listen. (Younger, College)

I can't stand the Joe Martin character. God, if I were Ruth for real, I'd leave him in a second. Here's this character who's obviously supposed to be the "good doctor". But, he's so supercilious. So damn smug. You see, I can't stand that. I think that if they want to create a "good" male character, they should make him healthy -- mentally, that is -- and not just a sick John Wayne cliché. (Older, College)

7. Predictions -- Again, the emphasis here is not on the specific content of the response, but the basis on which an informant predicts that which will happen in the future on a given soap opera. The narrative prediction is one in which the viewer employs her knowledge of real-life behavior or her own 'wish-fulfilling' desires in order to foretell events:

Note: All parenthetical descriptions are my own.

A: I would like Tara to remain with Chuck, and Phil to decide that they (Tara and Chuck) were happy and that the kid did love him (Chuck) and to just go out of their lives. That's all.

Q: How do you predict this whole thing will turn out?

A: I don't think that Phil is ever gonna marry her (Tara). Whether Erica (Phil's wife) will stop them, I don't know. But something.

Q: Is there anything in the story that makes you have this prediction?

A: Well, this visit that Chuck just made out to Arizona (where Tara and her child are). She (Tara) seemed so happy, so placid and so content with him. He gives her that feeling. She might love Phil more, but I don't think that Phil is aggressive, and here's a girl who's used to a lot and I don't think she's gonna have it with him. (Older, Non-college)

The structural prediction, on the other hand, is predicated on the viewer's awareness of daytime serial formula; she predicts in terms of how she knows soap operas are generally written:

Q: You said that the situation with Laurie is your favorite. How do you predict that will continue and end?

A: End? It won't end until she finds something better to do -- Jaime Lyn Bauer that is. She plays Laurie. I don't think she'll go back with Mark. I mean that wouldn't work on two levels. First, they can't have incest. Secondly, it seems that he has left the show and that he's written off. I do think that she'll sort of play around with Lance Prentiss, but it will be very dragged out. She'll probably fall for him and get her comeuppance or whatever -- in that his heart will always belong to Leslie. That will show that dignity and integrity (Leslie's) will always win out to sex and vampishness (Laurie's). So then, she'll (Laurie) publish that book about Leslie's institutionalization-- they're saving that for something -- in order to strike back and perhaps win Lance to her. But that will only serve to further endear him to Leslie. Meanwhile, Brad, Leslie's husband, will get mysteriously ill again, so the possibility of her to have a consoling-type affair with Lance. All this will probably take a year if none of the actors drop out. But it seems that it will make a nice, spicy plot with which to capture viewers. (Younger, College)

8. Excitement -- In the interview, informants discussed any soap opera episodes that they remember as having been particularly exciting. Empathic excitement is a result of interest in interpersonal situations not necessarily based on unpredictable or questionable outcome, or dealing with particularly titila-

ting themes (e.g., incest). In other words, here the viewer is just very interested in or 'for' the characters:

When Phoebe told the woman that she would pay for her every month and that she should write the letter, I could just kill (Phoebe). I was mad and excited. (Older, Non-college)

Critical excitement, on the other hand, is generally the result of either classic situations of intrigue (e.g., mystery) or seeing someone's predictions materialize, or the desire to see how far the writers will go with a sensitive topic:

I did on Ryan's Hope. Not excited, just surprised. A few days ago when they killed off Ed Coleridge -- out of nowhere, the guy's pushed off and he's dead. Usually you have some kind of idea that he's leaving the contract -- he's gonna walk off the soap opera. But just to throw the guy off the top and say "Whoop, there he goes". You couldn't believe it. That can't happen. Oh, we got excited in Somerset. There was a murder. Someone was trying to murder Heather. I don't know whether you know the characters. And we went through this whole long...of who it was. And the day we finally confronted Heather with the killer, quote unquote, and a few other people who happened to be around. We were all on the edge of our chairs thinking she's gonna kill him. (Younger, College)

9. Letter Writing -- Informants were asked about ever having written a letter "to anyone connected with a soap opera", and if so, to discuss the nature of that letter. Given that, as I will note shortly, letter writing was not reportedly a frequent occurrence among informants, respondents were asked to hypotheti-

cally describe a letter of this sort that they might consider appropriate. The distinction here is that empathic writers (first excerpt) address the letter to a fictional character in terms of his/her behavior in the story, and the critical writer addresses the letter to 'real' people, e.g., performers, writers, etc. (second excerpt):

I would write to Erica and tell her not to give Phil up and not to let Tara have him.
(Younger, Non-college)

I felt like writing letters about The Secret Storm, about how good it was -- some of the technical things that made it a good soap opera. Like how for the first time they were gradually moving men into roles that were as meaty as the women's roles, and that they were tackling unusual things like the occult -- about how well-acted, well-written, how well-balanced all the sub-plots were. (Younger, College)

10. Commercials -- As will be noted, most of the informants had seen daytime serial actors performing on advertisements on television. Asked about how they reacted upon seeing these actors in this context, those who responded empathically were disturbed by the conflict of seeing these individuals outside of their 'true' character:

Dr. Neeves, who I was getting to like on The Secret Storm, appeared on a Sominex commercial. I thought it was degrading for the great Dr. Neeves to appear on a Sominex commercial. (Younger, College)

The critical response, on the other hand, might register surprise or amusement upon recognizing a performer in a commercial, but usually it just noted such an appearance as "another job":

Yeah. I see them all the time. So, I think what a good job they have; getting all that revenue from commercials and soap operas. Wow! (Older, College)

11. Meeting -- Informants were asked whether or not they would like to meet "anyone connected with a soap opera". The empathic response (either "yes" or "no") involved meeting the characters:

Oh, I think I'd like to meet Mona Cain and maybe Dr. Tyler. They're very nice people. I sure wouldn't want into Erica. (Older, Non-college)

Wanting to meet either actors or writers and so forth, or wanting to be present at an actual taping session, characterized the critical response:

Well, I really wouldn't mind meeting any of them. The only reason I'd like to meet them would be to talk about the soap operas -- what it's like to put it together and just the technical details. But socially, I draw a very definite line between the character they are and the person they are -- and I know them only as the character and not as the person. So, to meet them at a party would only be based on physical attraction -- and even that, what I'm seeing on the screen is probably unrealistic. They're probably gay. I mean, actors

are generally known to be that and some of them are so good-looking that they're pretty, if you know what I mean. Also, I mean how, I mean what kind of desire would I have to meet any actor? (Younger, College)

12. Structural Details -- This final category involves two aspects of what is being labeled "structural details". The first dimension concerns the informants' awareness of technical problems in the soap opera, e.g., ersatz outdoor scenes. The second issue involves 'behavioral' irregularities, e.g., a child character being seven years old at one point in the story and turning 17 six months later. Awareness of both of these issues was coded as follows: First, it was determined whether an informant independently noted these problems in her discussion of other issues. For example, one informant noted a 'behavioral' irregularity when describing the content of a serial:

The Young and The Restless happens to be the most ridiculous of all the soap operas on television. I watch it because nothing else is on at twelve, but, like I've watched it all along and I've always thought it's been a little strange, but they pick up subjects which I really think are rather strange. But the one thing that really made me dislike it is that they had Laurie all of a sudden turned out to be Mark's sister. OK, and she was B-type blood. OK, well when they did the blood test on her it came back that she was O-positive or A or something, and all of a sudden, they called him back later and said, "Oh, we

made a mistake. It was B." They don't make those kinds of mistakes. I mean you can cost somebody their life if you're cross-matching and typing blood in the hospital and you say "Oh, they are O", and you give them O blood and they die. What do you say? "Oh, we're sorry they died?" And that was the kinda stuff. I mean, obviously they did it for effect. That's what the story's about. But to me, it was just kinda ridiculous. (Younger, Non-college)

Another way in which an informant might independently note a structural issue was in answer to a question in which she was asked whether there were any little details in the given soap opera that either amused or bothered her:

Well, I guess you could call the singing a minor thing, and that bothers me. It also bothers me that people are never really doing anything. I mean there's never any pretense of working at a job or around the house. You mean things like that? I could list a hundred. Like the fact that there's a teaching assistant -- a graduate student -- in the story, and he has this very plush, private office and he's around 35. I mean they use all the accoutrements belonging to a full professor and attach them to their image of an assistant. And, at that same college, the kids are always sitting around in this kind of cafeteria. It's like there are no classes. All colleges in soap operas are always State U., and they're always located right in these teeny towns like Genoa City and Pine Valley which ostensibly have a population of about 22. That's right. These little towns like Genoa City and Pine Valley always seem to have their State U., a major hospital for the doctors, or I

should say, the inevitable doctor characters. And everyone has all these exciting jobs in publishing, journalism, modeling and so forth right at home. Only occasionally do they have to go to Chicago or New York or something. (Younger, College)

If an informant did not independently note structural issues, there was a progression of questions designed to subtly investigate these problems. If she then discussed the issues as problems in the script or general production, it was coded as "structural recognition":

Q: Are there any little details in All My Children or any other soap opera that either amuse or bother you?

A: I'm not sure what you mean.

Q: Oh, for example, about Little Philip's age.³⁹

A: Oh yeah, for sure. Like he was a baby one minute and now he's a grown child. That's a pretty good trick. I wish I could do it with my youngest. Yeah, sure, those kinds of thing always bother me. The same thing happened on General Hospital. And do you know what else? Do you want me to go on?

Q: Sure.

A: Well, take Erica for instance. She's supposed to be this high-paid New York fashion model. You know, my oldest daughter wants to be a model. She's 5'8", and looks absolutely

³⁹ The character had just gone from infancy to grade school in a very short period.

undernourished. Now, this Susan something who plays Erica is quite attractive, but my God, she's about 5'2" or something. She seems to be the shortest member of the cast and she's a little chunky. Never the high fashion model type. The Mary Kennicott girl, now she could probably be a model. And you know what else? You know, I have three kids and I'm not exactly infertile, but I know what it's like to get pregnant. Now, in All My Children, Tara sleeps with Phillip one time -- one time -- and boom! -- she's pregnant. The same thing with Jill and Philip Chancellor on The Young and The Restless -- one night! I guess they want to show that these girls aren't tramps, so if they're gonna get pregnant, it has to be on that one time when they threw caution to the wind. But, you know, that's really sad. Suppose one of these women who believe in soap operas is watching and she's been trying to get pregnant for years now and can't. I bet she'd feel lousy watching all these girls conceive in two seconds. Don't they have to have some sort of doctor-advisor by law? Well, I'm sure they could argue that it's all possible, but it's certainly far from probable. (Older, College)

Thus far, a viewer's awareness of these problems could be coded as "structural" on two levels: "independent" awareness, or "recognition" after being more directly questioned. Narrative responses, on the other hand, were also of two types. In the first case, after being more directly questioned, an informant might 'recognize' the problem, but not deal with it as

a script or production irregularity. This sort of response is labeled as "narrative" because as an explanation for the problem, all rationales are derived from the story itself. The second type of narrative response occurs when after being directly questioned about these issues, the informant is totally indifferent to them as irregularities. The following excerpt demonstrates a combination of both narrative types:

Q: Let me ask you, are there any tiny little details, little incidental things on The Young and the Restless or any other soap opera that either amuse or bother you?

A: You know what bothers me? The darn commercials. I get so mad.

Q: Uh-huh. Because they...

A: Because they interrupt at the most important places. Just when you want to find something out, they come in.

Q: Anything else?

A: Like I say, if anybody comes in here -- my grandchildren: "Stop hollering. I can't hear!"

Q: Uh-huh. Well, how about the singing on The Young and the Restless?

A: Yeah. Yeah. I like that.

Q: Let's say that Brock is with his mother, and she's drinking, and all of a sudden he'll start to sing "Glory, glory Hallelujah" to her?

A: Well, I call him a lunatic sometimes. What did I call him? Oh, he's the one with the books. He's so religious. I forgot. I called him a name.

Q: Did you ever see any scenes where they are outdoors? In Lance's plane? Or when they were in Paris? Or when Laurie and Brock are in the park?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did those scenes catch your attention-- the sets?

A: No. I just thought it was fascinating -- all those places.

Q: Do you think the Fosters are like most poor people?

A: Well, they have a life like in our own life we have had. I know of a case just like that.

Q: Where one son is a lawyer and the other is a doctor?

A: They didn't have any professionals. Their children were just average workers and they were poor people.

Q: Uh-huh. Well, I understand that Gregg isn't supposed to work for a big, private law firm and that Snapper has been an intern or something for a very long time now, but...

A: It did bother me. It did bother me. I said to myself, "There's one son, a doctor. Can't he help his mother and father any?" Then my husband came back to me and said, "But he's only a student." I say, "But what do you mean? He still gets money." And one's a lawyer. He can't help the mother and father? And the old lady has to go out and look

desperately for work. My husband and I, we talk about that a lot. That's really a shame. You have children. You raise them and you're desperate. Who can you turn to? I feel sad about that. I felt sorry for the mother going out and beggin that woman for a job.

Q: Well, whether or not they'd really be like that in real life, aren't Gregg and Snapper supposed to be poor too? Do you think the story would make more sense if the two sons were either still in college or unemployed or something?

A: No. I think it's wonderful that she struggled to put them through to become professionals. But now, I'm kinda mad at them for not helping out. (Older, Non-college)

Given the codes for the 12 issues described above, I would now like to discuss informant patterns with regard to empathic vs. critical, narrative vs. structural, or, in general, reality vs. fiction orientations.

It would be misleading, I think, to even begin a discussion of this sort with the implication that there were informants with a complete reality-orientation toward soap operas, i.e., that there were informants who entirely believed that their soap operas were completely real. Although among soap opera aficionados, there are circulating stories (perhaps apocryhal) to the effect that some women, out of hatred, have actually physically molested soap opera villains on New York City streets, this sort of complete inability to discriminate between reality and

fiction is not supported by this research. From a sociolinguistic perspective alone, there was not a single informant who, at some time during her interview, didn't refer to "actors" or "story" or conversely, to the way it is in "real life". Therefore, it is quite clear (although not specifically subjected to empirical testing) that if directly confronted, all 40 informants would be able to tell anyone that the soap operas they view are acted, scripted, produced presentations.

To what then does this analysis refer? The answer here is that regardless of the proverbial bottom line (in this case, that each informant 'knows' the serials to be fiction) certain women, in viewing and assimilating soap opera events, treat them 'as if' they were indeed real. These women apply the same attributional strategies generally used in real-life contexts, in order to evaluate and, in general, 'make sense' of the fictional material. Conversely, other viewers generally do not apply real-life interpretive strategies in order to assess soap opera ongoings; they are oriented to the interpretation of fiction, and therefore, they use special rules for interpreting serial events.

What then is the criterion on which one labels one informant "reality-oriented" and another viewer "fiction-oriented"? To begin with, each informant can be said to have a 'reality quotient', i.e., the percentage of the 12 issues that she discussed

with an empathic or narrative orientation. This, of course, would be used to indicate the extent to which the informant treated soap opera events as if they were real-life.

In determining these quotients for any given interviewee, there was occasionally a response that fit neither reality nor fiction category. In this case, the percentage was derived only in terms of the issues that could be dichotomously coded for her. Also, if a response contained elements of both attribution and inference, it was coded as either structural or critical (whatever the pertinent option).

Given this system then, a 100% score (on the 12 issues) would indicate a total reality-orientation, and a 0% score would signal a total fiction-orientation. In comparing the informant groups' quotients, the results are quite striking. Whereas the non-college group averaged relatively high reality quotients (younger = 64.1%, older = 73.5%) the college-educated group averaged much lower scores (younger = 15.4%, older = 15.8%). Although in both cases the older informants averaged higher reality quotients, the really substantial difference is related to the education variable. In addition, it is important to point out that in all four conditions, the measurement of dispersion (standard deviation) was quite large. In three groups in particular (all but the older, college-educated individuals) there were from one to three informants whose scores varied so drastically from the others in their group, that

these cases will be discussed separately later in this section. And, as might be suspected, if these few divergent informants were segregated, the reality quotient averages noted above would even be considerably stronger in the given directions.

Now, before moving forward with this analysis, there is a sociolinguistic question that is inevitably raised here: Are these more educated viewers really more fiction-oriented than the less educated viewers, or are they simply more sophisticated articulators? This is quite a serious question if the reality/fiction issue is to have any meaning. Although the following answer is somewhat tentative, I suggest that this two-part explanation might be helpful here.

To begin with, the argument that a viewer's style of discourse does not necessarily reflect her underlying understanding of the material seems to open, in this case, a highly unproductive line of reasoning. For, if one is to draw any conclusions concerning the reality/fiction issue, it seems that one must address the way in which informants talk about soap operas. In other words, if one is to take an empirical route, the only comprehensive method by which the reality/fiction issue can be tapped is by specifically analyzing the discourse. This point, of course implies (and this is intentional) that the issue really isn't one of discursive style, but rather that the 'style', in and of

itself, signifies substantitive information. This inference seems to be supported by the second point which follows.

There are, of course, certain responses which, when considered apart from the interview as a whole, cannot justify labeling an entire interpretive strategy as either attributional or inferential. However, when an entire constellation of responses indicate among other things that, for example, there are viewers who, despite the fact that they watch nearly everyday, base their predictions for soap opera events on information that is irrelevant (if not contradictory) to 'production rules' for serials, and who, even though they sometimes state that the most dramatically exciting characters are villains, express a desire to see villainous characters "move away" or even die because they are reeking havoc on the good characters, it certainly leads one to believe that these methods of perception, interpretation and evaluation are rather peculiar for those who are actively treating the events as fiction. And, what begins to make a great deal more sense here is that these 'methods' are not just a reflection of articulatory style, but rather an indication of that which has been described as a reality-orientation. In other words, we are neither evaluating the quality of the informant's syntax here nor asking her intellectually demanding questions. Rather, we are examining the issues and events

to which the informant attends -- her 'style' of soap opera treatment. For these reasons (and with these limitations if necessary) the discussion of reality/fiction orientations will be continued with its original implications.

In summary then, two things can be stated: First, most informants are either strongly reality-oriented or strongly fiction-oriented. Only five informants out of 40 had scores less than 70% in one or the other direction, and 28 informants had scores 80% or over in either the reality or fiction category. Second, the data show quite clearly that the college-educated viewer (with only one outstanding exception) is overwhelmingly more fiction-oriented than is the non-college, generally reality-oriented informant (the latter group having four major exceptions).

In terms of the 12 specific issues, there were certain areas that seemed to be better predictors of the reality/fiction question than others. In particular, the issues of liking and disliking characters, describing content, predictions, commercials, meeting actors and structural details were the strongest differentiating issues. For example, in predicting forthcoming soap opera events, the college-educated informant almost always referred to soap opera formulae as a basis for her idea, whereas the predictions of practically all the non-college informants

were based upon the women's expectations concerning real-life behavior. Or, with regard to structural details, all of the college-educated informants either independently note or later acknowledged behavioral irregularities in soap operas, and 16 of these 20 women were also aware of some of the technical problems. On the other hand, among the non-college informants, eight were aware of behavioral irregularities and only six in any way recognized the technical features.

The letter-writing issue was perhaps the least valuable as a predictor. Although it might seem that this might be one of the most clear-cut issues, the problem here was that many of the informants were simply unable or unwilling to hypothetically construct such a letter as described earlier. While 17 of the 20 college-educated informants did construct "critical" letters, many non-college informants could not seem to think of anyone to whom they'd care to write.

In conclusion, it does not seem particularly surprising that the college-educated informants were more fiction-oriented (or less reality-oriented) than the less-educated respondents. To begin with, this data supports the findings of Gross' and Worth's students whose research also demonstrated that the more educated informants tend to be the most inferen-

tial in interpreting media events (Messaris⁴⁰, Pallenik⁴¹, Wick⁴²). The underlying reason here, of course, is simply that of academic training. Even the most basic first year English composition course in a college curriculum demands that the student begin to approach written works of fiction from a point of view that emphasizes authorship. Issues such as imagery, sentence style, and symbolism, for example -- issues which most college students are made to consider -- force these individuals to abandon many earlier patterns (usually developed in grammar school) in which one could write or talk about the "story", per se. To the extent that knowledge is irreversible, the individual who has been trained to always consider a 'work' in terms of its creator cannot easily abandon that training -- in the case of soap operas or anything else. For example, whenever I have taught courses in film criticism and aesthetics, there has inevitably been several students in these classes who have complained they are no longer able to "enjoy movies". Their com-

⁴⁰ Paul Messaris, "Interpretational Styles and Film Training", Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, (1975).

⁴¹ Michael Pallenik, "The Uses of Attributional and Inferential Strategies in the Interpretation of "Staged" and "Candid" Events", Master's Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, (1973).

⁴² Thomas Wick, "Attributional and Inferential Interpretational Strategies and Variations in their Applications to Written Communication as a Function of Training and Format", Master's Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, (1973).

plaint: that after being confronted with performing critical analyses of films, they cannot go to see a movie without considering the criteria of analysis that they have been taught.

Although one might argue that this sort of irreversible training is not necessarily harmful, one can also appreciate how it works. It is not simply that "trained" individuals are generally bound to consider authorship, but that the obligatory or conditioned recognition of this 'creating agent' also serves to prevent the trained individual from 'forgetting' the author factor, and hence, it prevents fictional events from being treated as real. However, while this conditioning may indeed cause the fiction-orientation, it is usually reserved for more advanced educational levels, and thus, it stands to reason that individuals without this training have little or no compunction to attend to the mediated aspects of the work (be it a novel or a soap opera) and hence, they are 'free' to relate to the work as if it were real, i.e., without using the special rules devised for critical analysis.

Finally, the issue of irreversability of training seems particularly germane when one considers that of the college-educated women, only one scored a relatively high reality quotient of 73%. It may also be interesting that the four non-college informants with low reality quotients (between 8% and 33%) were all married to college-educated professional (unlike the remaining non-college informants).

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY OF USES AND GRATI-
FICATIONS DATA AND THE REALITY/
FICTION ISSUE

In Chapter VII, the relationship between the uses and gratifications data and the reality/fiction orientations will be discussed. However, because of the large number of issues arising in the preceding two chapters, it would be efficient to first summarize the previously given data so that the forthcoming conclusions might be drawn more simply.

Uses and Gratifications

Below, one may find a brief synopsis of the uses and gratifications data.

The Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing -- Informants in this study regularly viewed approximately three soap operas per week. However, the non-college respondents tended to view more than those more educated. Similarly, the non-college respondents viewed the serials more frequently. The college-educated viewer was more likely to switch stations and to have time breaks between her serials.

More than half of the respondents claimed that they did not schedule their work around the serials they viewed. However, of the 14 respondents who reported having such special arrangements, all but one were in the non-college group.

It was shown that the college-educated informants reported much less dedication to the serials in terms of dealing with outside interruptions. In other words, compared to non-college viewers, the college respondents reported a greater willingness to dispense with any given soap opera segment in order to attend to such things as a phone call or a visit from a friend.

While close to half the informants said that they preferred to view soap operas unaccompanied, those who did prefer watching with others present were almost exclusively composed of college-educated individuals.

Lastly, while the majority of the informants explicitly expressed a lack of desire to expand their soap opera repertoires, there was a decided difference in terms of the reasons the women gave for not wanting a viewing increase. While the college-educated viewers tended to cite time as a relevant factor, the non-college viewers, in rejecting expansion, were more concerned with the 'emotional' investment that they perceived as being required in one's interaction with soap operas.

In analyzing the above "mechanics" data, the patterns which emerged seemed to indicate a certain dichotomy in terms of two different constellations of viewing habits; the intimate vs. remote orientation. More specifically, when all the issues in this section were considered jointly, it became clear that the

reports from the non-college viewers indicated a much more involved (intimate) interaction with the serials than those indicated by the more distanced (remote) college-educated respondents.

The Specific Appeals of Soap Operas as a Television Genre
and the Issue of Continuing Motivation -- Interestingly, of the 40 veteran viewers interviewed, more than half reported a preference for other television programming (e.g., variety, comedy) over daytime serials. This preference was particularly strong among the non-college viewers (those characterized as having a more intimate relationship with the serials).

When considering the reasons respondents gave for continuing on with their serials, the above-noted preferences seem less than surprising. Essentially, while most college-educated viewers (who comprised the majority of those who said they preferred serials to other TV fare) reported watching soap operas for purposes of "entertainment/relaxation", the non-college viewers indicated that their regular observance of the serials was a reflection of their interest in the story outcomes. These viewers also indicated that compared to other television programming, soap operas ranked substantially lower in sheer entertainment value. Not only do these comments reinforce the "intimate" label assigned to these non-college respondents (i.e., their involvement seemingly goes further

than soap operas merely serving to distract) but also, this information is quite compatible with the soon-to-be-summarized data regarding social learning.

The Individual Precedents of Soap Opera Viewing -- Among informants in this study, initiation to soap operas was reported having occurred in one of three ways: 1) with friends who either viewed with the subject or who told her about a soap opera(s), 2) from childhood, in terms of watching along with an older member of the household, and 3) independently, in terms of finding something in which to get interested. Of these data, the most interesting finding was that soap opera viewing was more likely to have been introduced as a lively, social activity among younger college students. For most other informants, the initial viewing experience was usually private unless it occurred with an older member of the household. However, except for the type of experience reported by some of the college students, all other types of accompanied viewing were usually inactive in terms of predicting dialogue or criticizing acting or script.

The Interactional Function of Soap Opera Viewing -- In this section there was a two-part emphasis; 1) the ways in which soap operas could be employed in everyday conversation, and 2) the extent to which viewers might rely on soap operas as a chance to privately observe and vicariously interact with

others.

All informants reported having conversations about soap operas. In almost all cases, these conversations were with other viewers. The data show three varieties of such conversations: First, there is the case of treating the soap opera material much as if it were gossip. In other words, informants reported conversing about, for example, how mean X is or how Y should leave her husband, etc. Second, almost all informants stated that at one time or another they have had conversations about the serials in order to catch up on missed segments -- in order to find out what they missed. Third, certain viewers reported engaging in analytic critiques of soap operas. In such cases, one might discuss how ludicrous or unrealistic a given plot twist is, or how a given soap opera is anti-feminist, etc.

The analytic or "treatment"-oriented conversations were almost only referred to by college-educated informants. The non-college women were more likely to cite conversations akin to gossip and/or those designed for purposes of catching up.

The Cathartic Function of Soap Operas -- Although 75% of the women questioned said that they had either laughed and/or cried in response to soap opera events, it is interesting (given the reputation of soap opera) that more informants reported experiences involving laughter than those eliciting tears or sadness. Although there were members of all age and

educational levels who said that they had on occasion cried (usually in response to the portrayal of illness or death) there were more reports of crying among the non-college viewers.

While many of these same non-college informants also reported laughing, there were several college-educated informants who, although they said they never cried or felt immensely sad, did report laughter. However, the laughter reported by most college-educated informants was generally in response to a different type of event from that which motivated the non-college informants to laugh. Essentially, the college-educated informants usually said that they found events such as mistakes by the actors in reciting dialogue, outrageously improbable interpersonal situations and so forth, to be worthy of laughter. This, of course, is very similar to their "treatment" orientation towards conversations about soap operas. The non-college informants, on the other hand, reported incidents in which laughter was in reaction to the story, per se. e.g., interplay between comedic characters, a villain receiving comeuppance, etc.

Soap Operas and Social Learning -- In general, informants were rather reluctant to discuss the possibility of their 'learning' from soap operas. Most of the women, regardless of education and particularly those who are younger, seemed to be aware of the stigma conventionally associated with daytime serials (if

not major network TV in general). Consequently, they seemed understandably reticent to indict themselves as individuals 'ingenuous' enough to receive the dramatic material in earnest. For example, when explicitly asked if they ever followed any of the advice offered in soap operas, only four respondents answered affirmatively. Many of the 36 remaining respondents were clear to point out sentiments to the effect that "of course, you can't learn...take advice, etc., because it's just television."

However, the less transparent a question involving social learning seemed to be, the more respondents seemed willing to discuss their own experiences. For example, although most had said that they had never "taken advice", more than half the informants said that there had been episodes in soap operas in which they were indirectly shown "what to do" in one situation or another. More specifically, these informants cited three types of possible learning experiences: 1) 'social issue' learning in which they academically learned about a relevant social problem such as child abuse or alcoholism, 2) practical information from which the viewer learned how to perform a specific task after it was enacted on a serial, 3) 'problem solving' where the informant was able to take an interpersonal problem in which she was involved and obtain a method of handling that problem in terms of a soap opera

enactment.

More non-college informants than those who were college-educated reported learning experiences of any of the above types, and considering these non-college informants, practical learning and problem solving were cited most often. Of the college-educated informants who cited experiences, no one type of learning was more prevalent than another.

Considering the issue of identification -- the extent to which a viewer would recognize certain soap opera situations as being similar to events she has known in real life -- over 60% of the informants reported such recognition. More non-college informants than college respondents indicated a sense of identification with soap opera material, and many of these non-college viewers were quite specific in their references, i.e., they were able to point to similarities with more intricate plot situations. The college viewer, on the other hand, was more likely to stress general points of identification, e.g., divorce, abortion and so on.

Finally, when asked about the type of problems or situations they prefer to see treated on soap operas (assuming that such preferences might indicate areas that provide useful information to the viewer) 90% of the respondents were able to note particular preferences. More than half of these respondents noted (often among other interests) a preference

for the treatment of contemporary or relevant social issues. However, while the non-college informants noting such issues were more inclined to cite relatively ideologically neutral topics from which they might learn something new (e.g., drug abuse or breast cancer) the college-educated informants were less likely to note issues of this sort. Rather, their interest was more in having ideological, possibly controversial, overtones inserted into the dramatic episodes. For example, some of these informants expressed a desire to see certain Black characters deal with racial problems.

In addition to these contemporary issues, respondents variously indicated interest in the portrayal of interpersonal relationships involving either general male/female interaction, marriage and family situations, or sex. Interestingly, in their references to one of the above interpersonal situations, there was a clear relationship between the informant's own social condition, so to speak, and the particular type of soap opera interaction in which she expressed interest. For example, unmarried women were more likely to cite male/female relationships, while married women were more apt to note the marriage portrayals. These data lead one to suspect that the "escapism" theory of television viewing may be an inappropriate explanation of why people watch and/or enjoy television.

Soap Operas and Social Adjustment -- The first issue examined in this section was that of demographic reinforcement -- the extent to which viewers prefer seeing situations involving characters who are similar to themselves in terms of demographic variables. Considering this issue, it can be said that in terms of age and marital status, informants tended to prefer characters similar to themselves, but with regard to sex, only a few college-educated respondents indicated a preference for female characters. In terms of age, marital status and sex, informants' preferences for a given type of character did not correlate with a negative reaction toward those characters who are portrayed as being dissimilar. The one exception to this is that younger informants noted a preference for younger characters while at the same time expressing a general dislike of the older characters. In dealing with the variable of socioeconomic status, the same pattern followed through for middle-class informants, i.e., while they listed middle or upper-middle class characters among their favorites, they did not express any general displeasure with non-middle-class characters. However, well over half of the working class informants not only cited the poorer characters among their favorites, but also regularly listed the wealthier characters among those they disliked.

The second major issue with which the "social adjustment" section was concerned is that of value orientations. In general, the interest here was with both the viewers' explicitly stated reasons liking and disliking stories and characters, and more specifically, the extent to which the viewers' attitudes toward the stories and the characters are a function of moral and ethical considerations.

Among the respondents, five major reasons for liking or disliking sub-plots and characters were cited: 1) demographic similarity or dissimilarity (liking and disliking respectively), 2) the physical appearance of characters, 3) drama -- the quality of the acting and script, 4) values -- sympathy with the behavior/personality of a character and/or liking or disliking a story on the basis of established rectitude, and 5) ideology -- judging events in terms of their perceived social or political overtones.

Similarly, respondents recommended changes for soap operas in terms of 1) dramatic structure, 2) values (i.e., suggestions that moral rectitude be established), 3) ideology (i.e., either for ideological issues to be inserted into the drama or for certain political implications to be changed.)

With regard to their likes, dislikes and recommended changes, the non-college informants were considerably more value-oriented than the college-educated respondents who tended to base

their judgments more on dramatic structure and ideology.

This value/non-value distinction was also found in terms of the respondents' attitudes toward soap operas' villains. Generally speaking, in terms of their personalities in the drama, respondents tended to dislike the villain characters (although more than half of the college-educated viewers assessed the villains on purely dramatic terms.) However, a major point here is that while college-educated viewers almost unanimously indicated that regardless of the villain's "personality", it was enjoyable to see villains in action, half the non-college informants reported disliking situations in which villainy is being perpetrated. In other words, even if it meant an acknowledged weakening of dramatic intrigue, these non-college respondents preferred the enactment of ethical, peaceful, interpersonal interaction.

Finally, the predictions respondents gave in terms of given story-lines also offer insight into the sentiments of the non-college viewers regarding moral rectitude. More specifically, these non-college viewers would usually predict outcomes in which "everything turns out alright". Often these informants could only base such predictions in terms of saying, "Well, that's the way it should be." College-educated informants on the other hand, even though they sometimes offered the same predictions as the non-college viewers,

usually substantiated their assessments in terms of what they perceived to be predictable soap opera formula.

Reality/Fiction Orientations

This area was designed to investigate the extent to which the informant could be said to treat the soap opera material as reality. A distinction was made between the attributional and inferential methods of interpretation. In the case of attribution, interpretation of soap opera material is based upon the viewer's applying (or attributing) her knowledge of the real world to the events in order to make sense of them. In the case of inference, the viewer discards the rules of real-life in favor of the laws of drama. In other words, the inferential viewer explicitly recognizes the soap opera events as intentionally authored message structures and therefore, in dealing with the stories, she infers meaning in terms of that authored intention. The attributional approach is equated with a reality orientation (i.e., the treatment of the material as real life) because the notion of authorship (and thus fiction) is ignored.

Twelve topics approached in the interviews were designated as having the potential to discriminate between attribution and inference. One such topic -- prediction making -- provides us with a good example of the basic distinction. In this case, it was designated as attribution if, in formulating her predictions, the viewer only took real-life stereotypes into consideration, i.e.,

she reasoned that X would occur in the soap opera because that is how people really behave. The designation of inference occurred when the respondent, in formulating her predictions, based her judgments on her explicit familiarity with soap opera conventions, i.e., she reasoned that X would happen in a serial because result X is what she perceived as the formulaic outcome typically employed by soap opera writers for the given situation.

Similarly, another such topic -- letter writing -- would also have the potential to discriminate between reality and fiction orientations. That is, in constructing letters to 'someone' connected with a soap opera, the respondent who would write to a character (as opposed to an actor) would be demonstrating a real-life orientation to the dramatic material.

As noted, in addition to these two topics (predictions and letter-writing) 10 other issues were considered capable of distinguishing between reality and fiction orientations. For each interview, a reality quotient (i.e., a measurement of the extent to which the soap operas are treated as real life) was derived by considering the 12 topics jointly.

In analyzing these data, it was discovered that no informant completely believed the soap operas to be documentary, i.e., really real life. In other words, if explicitly forced to consider the issue, the informants would have been able to under-

stand that the people in soap opera are actors who recite dialogue. However, in their day-to-day viewing, some informants suspend disbelief, so to speak, and typically treat the soap opera material as if it were indeed documentary or real. In other words, their style of making sense of the dramas, of discussing the portrayed situations, of analyzing the interpersonal complications, etc., is performed in the same manner, with the same orientation usually reserved for the treatment of events in real, everyday life. Therefore, these would be those informants having a high reality quotient or who would be designated as having a reality-orientation toward the soap operas. Those respondents with low reality quotients (i.e., fiction-oriented viewers) were those who were systematically inferential throughout their interviews. In other words, they explicitly differentiated between real-life behavior, expectations, etc., and the rules for fiction writing in soap operas. Therefore, it was the latter set of criteria (the rules) which these informants employed in interpreting and discussing the material.

For the most part, informants in this study were either strongly reality-oriented or strongly fiction-oriented. Although the older informants were slightly more reality-oriented than those under 30, the most important distinction again arose between the non-college and college-educated informants. More

specifically, those with college training were overwhelmingly more likely to deal with the soap operas as fiction, whereas those who had not attended college almost entirely comprised the group of reality-oriented viewers. A few non-college informants were atypical in that they were less reality-oriented (or more fiction-oriented) than the other members of the non-college group. These informants will be specifically discussed in the next chapter.

It was suggested at the conclusion of the preceding chapter that the fiction orientation common to the college-educated viewers is inevitably a function of academic training in criticism and analysis. In other words, while the critically untrained individual is generally permitted to discuss novels, fiction films, poetry, dramatic television, etc., exclusively in terms of the content of these events (i.e., what the story is about) the critically trained individual has, as part of her training, been required to take recourse to an 'author' behind a creation and to therefore deal with intentions, messages, symbolism and the like.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

AND REALITY/FICTION ORIENTATIONS

In this section, I will examine the extent to which the treatment of a soap opera as reality or fiction is related to the purposes the soap opera serves. On one hand, it seems intuitively proper to suggest that it is the reality or fiction orientation that should affect the rest, i.e., uses and gratifications. In other words, it seems that the way in which a viewer might learn from a soap opera, for example, could easily be a function of whether she treats the events as reality or fiction. On the other hand, television viewing patterns -- indeed, media consumption behavior in general -- may represent a constellation of motivating factors so that to isolate anything resembling a causal paradigm may be thoroughly unreasonable. In either case, and particularly if the latter position is more true, the investigation of the relationship under consideration here can at least serve to determine those factors which seem to move together in patterned regularity.

Since, as we have seen, the reality/fiction patterns seem to be most related to the informants' educational levels, in the following review of certain uses and gratifications issues, special attention will be directed to distinctions in various issues that were related to education. Following this, we will consider those

few informants whose reality quotient was unlike the other women in whose group they were categorized.

Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing

Earlier in this report, the responses to the "mechanics" questions were recoded in terms of a remote vs. intimate dichotomy. As discussed in that section, it was found that the non-college informants had a more intimate relationship with the serials than did the college-educated viewers. In other words, the non-college women tended to view more frequently, were more dedicated to the programs while viewing, considered viewing more of an 'emotional' expenditure, and so on, than did the more remote, college-educated viewers.

Now, the relationship between these patterns and the reality/fiction orientations seems quite logical. Those non-college viewers who tend to treat the soap operas more as reality are more serious about and more involved with them seemingly because a more critical, fiction orientation (as held by most college informants) would, at least in part, force the viewer to step back, so to speak, and regard the show in its fuller production context.

Social Learning

In reviewing the data on social learning, it must be remembered that slightly less than half of the college-educated informants could report incidents in which a soap opera was helpful to them in their own lives. However, more than half of the non-college

informants could note incidents of this nature. On one hand, it could be argued that the reason there were less reports of this type among the college-educated is either because they are attending more to production aspects of the soap operas and/or because the 'informational credibility' of the soap operas as fiction is so sufficiently low for them that they do not consider the serials to be useful as learning experiences. With this same rationale, for the reality-oriented, non-college informants, soap operas' credibility as behavioral models would seem to be greater, and therefore, the serials may be seen as more useful in the social learning process. However, because of the previously discussed interviewing problems connected with 'learning' issues, it may be more useful here to consult the data derived from the questions that more subtly dealt with the learning phenomenon.

Although more than half of all the informants indicated that they could identify with events portrayed on soap operas, the reality-oriented informants could be more specific in their identifications. In other words, for them, identification could go beyond general social situations such as marital problems. However, those treating the events as fiction were largely unable to make these specific identifications. Perhaps it could be argued that here, at least, the reality-orientation is a function of identification rather than the reverse. For, if

indeed there really are more similarities between the non-college informants and those characters portrayed on soap operas than there are for the college-educated viewers (that is, if the identification is not simply a matter of perception) then it might also stand to reason that, as a function of these similarities, the serials become more real. However, since evidence accumulated in previously cited research indicates that the less critically-trained media users tend to be uniformly more attributional (or more reality-oriented in general) than those with critical training, the notion that the actual content of soap operas causes greater identification among the 'untrained' is less tenable.

With respect to the different types of information with which soap operas may provide viewers, there are two things in common between the reality and fiction oriented viewers. First, most informants, particularly the reality-oriented, seemed to accept the veracity of the information about 'contemporary issues'. Therefore, to the extent that soap operas are attempting to educate women on 'relevant' concerns, it seems that they have the potential to do this with all types of viewers.

Second, both reality and fiction oriented viewers demonstrated particular interest in soap opera representations of women in situations similar to their own. For example, many non-married informants expressed interest in portrayals of male-female relationships. However, the fiction-oriented viewers seemed to be

much more concerned with the ideological aspects of such portrayals than were the reality-oriented informants, who were much less concerned with the politics behind the representations. Whether the more fiction-oriented viewers wished to see more ideologically-oriented stories so that they could better identify, or because they recognized soap operas as a learning instrument for "others" and wanted their politics to be positively examined is unclear. However, what is clear is that the learning or simple interest value of the specific interpersonal problems (as opposed to social issues or practical information) was greater for the reality-oriented viewers than for those who were more inclined to treat the soap operas as fiction.

Clearly, the data accumulated specifically for the social learning section is not as conclusive as one might wish. Clearly, there is some data accumulated in this section which indicates that the more reality-oriented viewer is more willing and more apt to learn from the more interpersonal issues in daytime serials. However, data accumulated in earlier sections of the interview would logically seem to even more strongly support this pattern. To begin with, the entire remote vs. intimate distinction may not be unrelated to learning, as it is clearly not unrelated to reality/fiction patterns. The simple fact that the more intimate, reality-oriented viewers are more absorbed by or more dedicated to what they're seeing must have some implications with regard to

learning. Indeed, educators frequently cite involvement and dedication as being important factors in the learning process.

Also, it may be pertinent to the learning issue that reality-oriented viewers preferred other types of television programs to soap operas -- particularly because they found the serials they were already viewing to be too 'emotionally draining.' Traditionally, having to deal with problems -- indeed the whole business of learning -- is not touted as being particularly enjoyable as a supposedly "escapist" entertainment vehicle is. And, if we recall, most of these reality-oriented viewers reported that they continue to watch soap operas not for entertainment as many fiction-oriented viewers claimed, but because of their interest in story outcomes. Of course, it would be hard to believe that all viewers are not ultimately interested in outcomes as well. Few people are even capable of leaving a movie without seeing how the story resolves. However, in the case of soap operas, the sheer entertainment value of watching the events unfold, particularly in terms of guessing outcomes, really seems to be more a part of the fiction-oriented viewer's system. Finally, the data indicating that the reality-oriented informants were more prone to vicarious interaction with soap operas may not be irrelevant here. Certainly, the fact that these viewers are more apt to accept the portrayals as representative of 'other people's' lives might permit more social learning to occur.

Social Adjustment

In considering the issue of demographic reinforcement, there seems to be very little difference between reality and fiction oriented informants, and the distinctions that have appeared seem to be more understandable in terms of how they relate to demographic variance itself. However, when one considers the entire 'value' issue, a clear distinction does emerge. Most reality-oriented viewers were concerned with moral rectitude and seeing justice established, whereas the fiction-oriented viewers were largely unconcerned with such matters. There are two possible explanations here. First, one could not, as mentioned earlier, easily interpret these data by suggesting that the fiction-oriented viewers are amoral, unethical or unconcerned with ultimate justice. Rather, it could be suggested that because they regard the serials as fiction, it is not that important to them to see rectitude and goodness materialize. Reality-oriented viewers, on the other hand, may be concerned with seeing their sense of moral triumph borne out because of their treatment of the serials as reality.

An alternative and possibly more intriguing explanation may be that fiction-oriented viewers are not upset by the more evil characters and states of unhappiness or injustice in the serials, not only because they are not treating the serials as real-life, but possibly because they perceive these situations as being more

realistic (i.e., more typical of outcomes in everyday life.)

Indeed, when these viewers recommended changes, they often suggested the portrayal of more social problems and more ideologically complicated situations. If we assume for the moment that the informants' reality or fiction orientations extend to their viewing of other television drama, then it might be argued that the fiction-oriented viewer (whose total TV exposure was slightly less than the reality-oriented informant) looks more unfavorably upon the non-serial dramas (as they did indicate) because of their typically quick and positive resolutions. The reality-oriented viewers, on the other hand, expressed a preference for these other dramas and, perhaps their desire to see rectitude quickly and simply established reflects their interpretation of life's patterns as derived from their night-time viewing and the general social mythology in which they were inculcated (which, of course, is probably not unrelated to television viewing). Because of the continuous nature of soap operas, it is somewhat difficult to unimpeachably state that 'positive' resolution ultimately materializes in the serials' plots. Therefore, those who have learned that "good always triumphs" (and not just as a matter of narrative convenience) may want to see such mythology played out in events which they tend to treat as real-life.

Reality/Fiction, Education, and Uses and Gratifications

It should be noted that it appears that reality or fiction orientations are the most precise indicators of the uses and gratifications issues discussed previously. More specifically, if one considers the five informants whose reality quotients were unlike the other women in their given categories (one younger-college, 3 younger-non-college, and one older non-college) it can be said that their responses to the uses and gratifications issues were more similar to others with like reality quotients. Indeed, as noted earlier in a more specific context, if these five informants were to be dropped from consideration, the patterns in terms of the education variable would have been more sharply distinguished. However, since the four non-college, low reality quotient informants were married to college-educated professionals (unlike the remaining non-college informants) it still seems likely that the reality/fiction issue and the education variable are inextricably related -- although it may point to the fact that critical training need not exclusively be derived from a college education, per se.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis has provided a description of different aspects of the relationships women may cultivate with the soap operas they view. It specifies how different features of these relationships may be related to age and education. With regard to the education variable, which figured very importantly in describing these patterns, it should be noted that

members of higher-income households are less likely to watch soap operas. This phenomenon is explained in part by data collected in 1969 for different educational levels. If the head of a household had only 1-8 years of grade school the average audience was 12.2 percent; if he had 1-3 years of high school it was 9.6 percent, if he had finished high school it was 9.3 percent; if he had 1-3 years of college it was 7.1 percent; if he had graduated from college it was 5.2 percent. Thus, education of head of household (which is closely related to household income) was inversely related to the tendency to watch soap operas; the serials are most popular among the low-income, low-education groups.⁴⁴

Therefore, if one is largely concerned with the notion of "effects", it is probably the viewing behavior of the non-college informants that is more indicative of general soap opera

⁴⁴ Natan Katzman, "Television Soap Operas: What's Been Going on Anyway?", Public Opinion Quarterly (Summer, 1972) p. 205.

viewing patterns. This, of course, means that we are referring to those informants who demonstrated a more involved, intimate relationship with the serials -- relationships in which learning, identification and value reinforcement were more likely to occur. In general, these were the viewers who treated the serials as if they were real-life.

The significance of including the statistically atypical college-educated informant was simply to determine whether the 'continuous-intimacy' provided by the serials encourages all its viewers to react in a unidimensional way. Apparently, the force of the specialized soap opera format is not that strong; viewers do vary in their treatment of the serials. Of course, it remains for future research to determine whether or not, in comparison to other fictional television formats, the soap opera is more powerful in terms of its social force.

Obviously, the inclusion of the education (and age) variables at least anticipated some differentiation among informants. And clearly, the education issue has more than academic/methodological implications.

From a more pragmatic, "effects" perspective, the data collected in this study suggest two courses of action. First, given that critical training (which appears to traditionally emerge from higher education) seems to prevent an intimate,

reality-oriented relationship (and all its accompanying learning and adjustment implications) from occurring, it seems obvious that if we have certain fears about the socializing power of soap operas (and perhaps television in general) we begin to think about the benefits of encouraging individuals (long before their college years) to learn and thereby adopt a critical framework for the interpretation of media events. Second, given that we do have evidence of several types of learning, value adjustment and other social behavior that result from soap opera viewing, it should be clear that the rather cavalier, often disrespectful attitudes frequently held toward soap operas might be revised. When millions of viewers are willingly subjected daily to these programs, they should not simply be just a topic for variety show satires and the monologues of stand-up comedians. Indeed, the dearth of empirical, academic research on soap opera viewers indicates that media scholars, themselves, are guilty of ignoring, if not avoiding, an area quite worthy of consideration.

Since it is recommended that more empirical research in this area be performed, it may be suggested that in considering areas for future study, there are really two issues to be examined. The first is relatively simple -- namely, to indicate that there are certain points in the present research that need to be ex-

tended. For example, in establishing an overview for this daytime serial-oriented study, it would be helpful if studies comparing soap opera viewing and viewing behavior relating to other television drama would be performed. With such a perspective, one could begin to discriminate among the various fiction genres in assessing their influence in viewers' lives. Similarly, the present research might be viewed in a more interesting light if we were to accumulate similar data on male daytime serial viewers.

Recommendations such as those suggested above require an expansion of the research context. However, the second issue which must be considered in terms of future research is not one of compiling a series of studies for comparison, but one of refining the basic method common to all such studies -- a refinement that would improve the level of data obtained.

In reviewing the findings provided by the present study, there is a serious shortcoming which demands consideration. More specifically, it can be said that while this research largely provides insights into viewers' articulated responses to soap opera issues, there still remains virtually unexamined a most important aspect of the social learning phenomenon, i.e., the relationship between the worldview of soap operas (collectively) and the worldviews held by their viewers. In other words, it would be very profitable indeed to interrogate daytime serial viewers not specifically in

regard to their viewing behavior, but in terms of their attitudes toward topics which comprise the substance of soap opera problems, e.g., concealment of problems, marital infidelity, self-sacrifice and so forth. In this manner, one could determine the extent to which there is a similarity between daytime serial morality and that of its viewers. Of course, with such a study, one could not discover similarities and automatically point to them as evidence of "learning from soap operas". That is to say, it can be argued that daytime serials do little more than to dramatize the lessons of traditional "middle-class morality".

However, there seem to be at least three ways in which these sorts of data might be supplemented in order to determine the extent to which the viewers' attitudes are derived from daytime serial content. First, in combination with research like the present study, one could begin to examine the degree to which intimacy, reality orientations, the ability to identify and the willingness to learn from the serials is positively correlated with having similar worldviews. Second, through rigorous analysis, one could begin to isolate those controversial issues which seem (in terms of high frequency) disproportionately dealt with in soap operas (as compared to the frequency with which these topics are treated both in other media and in everyday interaction). Particular concentration on these sorts of issues (e.g., the

problems of the lower-class individual who marries into a phenomenally wealthy family) since they are infrequently encountered outside the context of the soap opera, might oblige viewers to reflect upon soap opera content. Finally, one might want to compare demographically matched soap opera viewers and non-viewers in order to investigate any distinctions in terms of worldviews.

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW FORM

I Uses and Gratifications

A. Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing

1. What soap operas do you watch? About how many times a do you watch each one?
2. Would you like to watch more soap operas?
3. Do you prefer to watch soap operas alone or with others?
Why?
4. If a friend stopped in to chat or the phone rang when one of your soap operas was on, what would you do?
5. Do the serials you watch fit into your free time or do you schedule your work around them?

B. Soap Operas and Other Television

6. Do you prefer soap operas to other types of TV programs?
If so, why? If not, what other kinds of shows do you prefer? Why?

C. Individual Precedents and Continuing Motivation

7. How did you start watching soap operas?
8. In general, why do you continue to watch soap operas?

D. Interactive Functions of Soap Operas

9. Do you ever talk about the serials with anyone? If so, to whom and what do you talk about?
10. Do you think that soap operas are a good way to find out

what the private lives of others are like? Explain.

E. Cathartic Function of Soap Operas

11. Can you tell me about any times you cried and/or laughed in response to something that happened in a soap opera?

F. Soap Operas and Social Learning

12. What sort of problems or situations do you like to have or would you like to have treated in a soap opera? Why?
13. Did you ever come across a problem or situation in any of your serials that you or anyone else you knew had also come across? Explain.
14. Can you talk about any stories or episodes that were important to you because they showed you what to do in a particular situation? Explain.
15. Did you ever try out any of the advice or solutions to problems provided by soap operas? If so, what happened, and would you ever look toward the soap operas for advice again? Why? If not, do you think you ever would? Why?
16. In any of the soap operas you watch, was there ever a situation in which you would have acted differently from the way it happened in the story? Explain.
17. In general, are there any kinds of morals or rules for living that one can get from watching soap operas?

G. Soap Operas and Social Adjustment

18. If you could only watch a limited number of soap operas, what would be your first, second and third choices?
19. Briefly, what is the content of each of these serials?
20. Have you ever watched any soap opera that you don't watch now? If so, why did you stop watching this serial(s)?
21. Are there any serials you really don't like at all? If so, which ones? Why?
22. In Specific Serial do you have any favorite parts or sub-plots? Which ones? Why?
23. In Specific Serial are there any parts or sub-plots you really don't like? Which ones? Why?
24. In Specific Serial do you have any favorite characters? Who? Why?
25. In Specific Serial are there any characters you really don't like? Who? Why?
26. In Specific Serial what do you think about villains? Do you like to see them when they're on?
27. If you could change anything in Specific Serial, what would you change? Why?
28. How do you think favorite sub-plot will continue and end? What makes you say this?
29. What other predictions would you make concerning any of the events in Specific Serial? What makes you say this?

30. Do you prefer seeing situations more similar to your own, or do you prefer those quite different from your own? Why?

II Reality/Fiction Orientations

A. Extra-Frame Issues

31. Do you ever remember getting excited about a story? Explain.
32. Did you ever write a letter to someone connected with a soap opera? If so, to whom did you write and what did you say? If not, were you to hypothetically write such a letter, to whom would you write and what might you say?
33. Did you ever see a soap opera person in a commercial? If so, what was your reaction? Do you remember the products of these commercials? Would a soap opera person's appearance influence your buying in any way?
34. Would you like to meet anyone connected with a soap opera? Explain.

B. Structure-Related Issues

35. Are there any little details that either amuse or bother you in Specific Serial? If not, what do you think about specific technical and behavioral inaccuracies?

III Personal Data

- 36. Age
- 37. Education
- 38. Viewer's and/or supporting members of household's
occupations(s)
- 39. Marital and Family Status
- 40. Number of TV viewing hours per day
- 41. Number of films viewed per month
- 42. Incidence of newspaper reading
- 43. Magazines regularly read

APPENDIX II: THE INTERVIEW CODING FORM

I Uses and Gratifications

A. Mechanics of Soap Opera Viewing

_____ The number of soap operas viewed

The scheduling of soap operas

Temporal Scheduling:

_____ all serials viewed follow each other consecutively

_____ there are time breaks between serials viewed

Network Scheduling:

_____ all serials viewed are presented on the same network

_____ viewer changes networks

Alone/together

_____ viewer prefers watching serials unaccompanied

_____ viewer prefers watching serials with others present

_____ no preference

Outside Interruptions

_____ totally postpones interruptions until completion of
segment(s)

_____ attempts to attend to both the interruption and
segment(s)

_____ turns off or ignores segment(s) in order to fully
attend to interruption

_____ Rank on Dedication Scale

Scheduling of Activities

_____ Scheduled -- viewer attempts to schedule work,
duties, etc., around her serials

_____ Free-time -- viewer makes no special arrange-
ments in scheduling her work, duties, etc.,
in order to watch serials

Expansion of Soap Opera Repertoire

_____ Yes, viewer would like to increase the number
of serials she views

_____ No, viewer would not like to increase the
number of serials she views because:

_____ Time Expenditure -- does not want to
spend any more physical time

_____ Emotional Expenditure -- does not want
to become more involved in problems

Intimate/Remote Issues

Intimate	Remote	Other	
_____	_____	_____	Network Changing
_____	_____	_____	Consecutive Viewing
_____	_____	_____	Scheduling Activities
_____	_____	_____	Alone/Together
_____	_____	_____	Outside Interruptions
_____	_____	_____	Expansion/Repertoire

B. Soap Operas and Other Television

- _____ Viewer prefers serials to all other programs
- _____ does not view anything but serials
- _____ views other programs, but prefers serials
- _____ Viewer prefers other programs to serials
- _____ documentaries/news
- _____ variety/music
- _____ drama, prime-time
- _____ comedy, prime-time
- _____ other daytime

C. Individual Precedents and Continuing Motivation

Initial Motivation -- viewer began watching serials as a
result of:

- _____ Friends who already viewed
- _____ word of mouth
- _____ direct participation with others
- _____ Childhood experience
- _____ Independently as a result of nothing else to do

Continuing Motivation -- viewer continues to watch because:

- _____ relaxation/entertainment
- _____ interest in outcome
- _____ habit/addiction

D. The Interactional Function of Soap Opera Viewing

Conversations

_____ Yes, viewer discusses serials with others
 _____ discusses story -- like gossip
 _____ catching up
 _____ treatment -- deals with script and production

_____ No, viewer does not discuss serials with others

Vicarious Interaction

_____ Yes, viewer considers soap operas to be a good way
 to find out about the private lives of others
 _____ No, viewer does not consider serials to be informative
 with regard to the private lives of others
 _____ Ambivalent, viewer is unsure of the serials' capabilities
 in this regard

E. The Cathartic Function of Soap Operas

Crying

_____ viewer never cried or felt immensely sad
 _____ story-stimulus crying -- crying over something that
 was intended to be sad in the serial

Laughing

_____ viewer never laughed

_____ story-stimulus laughing

_____ comedy -- laughing over something that was intentionally funny in the serial

_____ non-comedy -- disbelief or moral triumph

_____ treatment-stimulus laughing -- laughing over something that is perceived as unintentionally funny

F. Soap Operas and Social Learning

Nature of Problems -- viewer prefers to see the following
events portrayed:

- _____ Contemporary Issues
- _____ Public Service Information
- _____ Ideology in interpersonal relationships
- _____ Non-ideological Interpersonal Relationships
- _____ Male/Female relations
- _____ Marriage and family
- _____ Sex
- Criminal Intrigue

Identification

_____ Yes, the viewer has come across a situation or problem in a serial that she or someone else she knows has also come across

_____ specific identification

_____ general identification.

_____ No, the viewer has never seen any problem or situation in a soap opera that she or anyone else she knows has also come across

Learning

_____ Yes, social issue learning -- the viewer has learned about general social causes or issues, e.g., how Alcoholics Anonymous functions

_____ Yes, practical learning -- the viewer has learned to perform a specific task after it has been enacted on a serial, e.g., heart massage

_____ Yes, specific problem-solving learning -- the viewer has learned to handle a specific interpersonal problem from watching soap operas

_____ No, the viewer has never learned anything from a soap opera

Application of Soap Opera Information

_____ Yes, the viewer has followed a serial's solution to a problem, advice, etc.

_____ No, the viewer has never followed such advice, but would be willing to do so. _____

(criterion of applicability)

_____ No, the viewer would never follow advice from a serial

Disclaiming

_____ In the learning section (_____)

the viewer prefaced a personal example of a
learning experience with a statement indicating
that soap operas are ineffectual in this regard

_____ Between that which the viewer offers in the
learning section and that which she offers else-
where in the interview, there are contradictions
concerning her ability to learn from soap operas

Morals or Rules for Living

_____ Yes, viewer regards serials as providing morals
or rules for living

_____ No, viewer does not regard serials as providing
morals or rules for living

G. Soap Operas and Social Adjustment

Favorite sub-plot(s) _____

Disliked sub-plot(s) _____

Favorite character(s) _____

Disliked character(s) _____

Recommended change(s) _____

Prediction(s) _____

Demographics; likes and dislikes

Majority of viewer's liked sub-plots and characters involve:

___females ___young ___middle-upper ___married ___parents
 ___males ___old ___lower-middle ___single ___childless

Majority of viewer's disliked sub-plots and characters involve:

___females ___young ___middle-upper ___married ___parents
 ___males ___old ___lower-middle ___single ___childless

Demographic Effects; liking one, disliking counterpart

___sex ___age ___class ___marital status ___parental status

Place * next to those effects which indicate that viewer's
 preferences favor her own demographic situation

Values -- viewer likes or dislikes sub-plots and characters
 on the following bases:

___demographic similarity

___drama -- ___acting ___dramatic structure

___physical appearance of characters

___values

___personal qualities-- characters are evaluated
 on the basis of their personality

___rectitude -- situations are liked because
 things are as they should be
 or disliked because viewer's
 standards of rectitude are not
 met

_____ Ideology -- viewer likes or dislikes events due
to her perception of the overtones given to those
actions

Changes -- viewer recommends changes involving:

_____ drama
_____ value/rectitude
_____ ideology

Predictions -- viewer predicts recommended changes

_____ yes _____ no

Villains

_____ viewer likes villains
_____ personal sympathies
_____ drama
_____ other (_____)
_____ viewer dislikes villains
_____ morality portrayed
_____ drama
_____ other (_____)
_____ viewer likes to see villains
_____ viewer dislikes seeing villains
_____ there are characters viewer 'likes', but dislikes
seeing

Explicit Preferences

_____ Viewer prefers to see characters and situations which seem to be more similar to her own condition

_____ Viewer prefers to see characters and situations which are different from her own conditions

_____ No preference

II. Reality/Fiction Orientations

Talking about Soap Operas with Others

_____ Structural--viewer discusses soap operas in terms of handling of the story and characters, e.g., acting, scripted dialogue

_____ Narrative--viewer discusses the events, per se, much like gossip

_____ Other, e.g., catching-up

Laughing and Crying

_____ Critical--viewer laughs at events in the soap opera that are not intended to be funny within the context of the story

_____ Empathic--viewer cries or laughs at events in the soap opera that are sad or funny within the context of the story

_____ Other

Acting Differently

_____ Critical--in discussing how she would have acted

differently, viewer objectively discusses how various characters mishandle relationships

_____ Empathic--in discussing how she would have acted differently, she places herself directly in the narrative action

_____ Other

Describing Content

_____ Structural--viewer describes soap opera content in general thematic terms, e.g., it's about love and life

_____ Narrative--viewer describes soap opera content in terms of specific events

Changing Content

_____ Structural--the changes suggested by the viewer involve the manipulation of the production, writing, casting, etc.

_____ Narrative--the changes suggested by the viewer involve changes in a character's behavior without recognition of the script

_____ Other

Liking and Disliking Characters

_____ Critical--viewer likes or dislikes characters on the basis of their contribution to the drama and/or because of the ideological implications of the fictional representation

.....
 Empathic -- viewer likes or dislikes characters on
 the basis of their personalities within the drama

Predictions

.....
 Critical/Structural -- viewer bases her predictions
 on her knowledge of daytime serial formulae

.....
 Empathic -- viewer bases her predictions on real-life
 stereotypes or personal wish fulfillment

Excitement

.....
 Structural -- viewer becomes excited over classic
 situations of intrigue, etc.

.....
 Narrative -- viewer becomes excited over interpersonal
 situations not necessarily based on unpredictable
 or questionable outcome

Letter Writing

.....
 Critical -- viewer addresses letters to real people

.....
 Empathic -- viewer addresses letters to fictional
 characters in terms of their behavior within the story

Commercials

.....
 Critical -- viewer has seen actors on commercials and
 treats their performances as 'another job', i.e., she
 is not disturbed

.....
 Empathic -- viewer has seen actors on commercials and
 is disturbed by the conflict

.....
 other

Meeting

_____ Critical -- the viewer does or does not want to meet
 _____ actors

_____ Empathic -- the viewer does or does not want to mee
 _____ characters

_____ other

Structural Details

_____ viewer independently notes structural problems

_____ technical _____ behavioral _____ bothered

_____ viewer recognizes structural problems

_____ technical _____ behavioral _____ bothered

_____ viewer is indifferent to structural problems

Reality Quotient: _____

III Personal Data

Age: _____ under 30 _____ over 35

Education: _____ high school or less _____ college

Occupation: _____

Household Supporter's Occupation: _____

Social Class: _____ working _____ middle

Specific Serial: _____ All My Children _____ Young and Restless

Hours of TV per day: _____

Number of films per month: _____

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